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SHE HELD THE BOUQUET AT ARM'S-LENGTH AND GLARING AT IT, CRIED: "IF I COULD TREAT YOU AS MY HATRED PROMPTS, I WOULD TRAMPLE YOU TO ATOMS UNDER MY FEET!"

## BOWIE,

### THE KNIGHT of CHIVALRY;

OR,

What a Woman Will Do.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "ELEGANT EGBERT," ETC., ETC.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### UNDER THE GAS-LIGHT.

DEAR reader, accompany me in fancy to New Orleans—"the Paris of America!"—where Life throbs with tropic fervor, and Death reaps his ghastly swath amid sounds of gayety that seek to veil his terrors in forgetfulness! Stand with me on her broad levee, which dykes the mighty river that drains a continent! Listen to the blended melody and discord of tongues culled from every quarter of the earth to make her busy mart a second Babel! Walk her tree-embowered thoroughfares where fashion and folly flaunt their glittering bangles—where one clothed in the sanctity of honorable motherhood gazes without a blush on the painted siren whose smile is a mockery and whose touch is death!—where the villa, within whose precincts cluster the sacred associations of home, is flanked by the gilded palaces of vice. Contrast the life giving beauty and fragrance of her gardens with the death-exhaling swamp that peoples her strange burial-grounds!—as if the work of men were reflected on the face of nature!

Our story opens "under the gas-light!" The time was early evening.

Among the group of men standing before the entrance to the celebrated St. Charles Hotel, two claim our attention.

The younger man was of the Saxon type, with fair hair and blue eyes. His commanding figure of full six feet, and a rather fierce expression of countenance when in repose, made him look, what he was, a formidable antagonist in a physical encounter. Yet there was a frankness about him which pronounced him generous almost to impulsiveness.

Such was James Bowie—a man who never forgot a friend, nor forgave a foe!

The stooping figure, the grizzled hair, and the deep lines in the face of the elder man seemed to indicate a period far beyond the meridian of life, yet he was not old. The tremor which agitated his hand seemed the index of feebleness, yet one who had felt its iron gripe had something to remember.

Nor were these the only contradictions about the man. The cut of his coat and a white "choker" which he affected, gave him a clerical appearance, from which he had derived his sobriquet of "The Curate," few in all New Orleans knowing him by any other title; yet, in expression of face he was the antipodes of a clergyman. His restless gray eyes had a vulture-like eagerness, while his thin lips either quivered nervously, or were compressed into a straight line beneath his overhanging mustache.

He was a man in the prime of life, so far as years went, originally gifted with a powerful physical organism, yet whose soul was consumed by a fever that knew no abatement.



The demon of chance had stamped that haggard face with his sign manual!

At the moment of introducing him to the reader the Curate was a study. In manners he outdid the suavity of a Frenchman, yet all the while his restless eyes teemed with crafty watchfulness. Without being obtrusively servile, every word, look and gesture was intended to conciliate the favor of the younger man.

James Bowie had the off-hand frankness of a man in whose thoughts double-dealing finds no place.

While they were talking Bowie's eye was attracted by a slight female figure passing with a grace of movement that could but elicit keen admiration.

The woman, evidently young, was dressed plainly in black, and veiled. Her step was hurried, and she betrayed a timidity which showed that she was not accustomed to find herself alone in the street at night.

As she passed under the brilliant lights in front of the hotel, a dandy who had been ogling the passers-by from the curb-stone stepped to her side, raised his hat and said, impudently:

"Ah! good-evening, ma'am'selle!"

With a low cry the girl shrunk away in affright.

One stride, and Bowie grasped the offender by the nape of the neck and hurled him violently against the lamp-post.

A low ejaculation rose to the Curate's lips, and he flushed with surprise or displeasure. Taking the girl by the wrist without ceremony, he drew her hand within his arm.

The girl looked up, evidently recognized him, and clung to his arm; then, yielding to a second impulse, seemed almost to shrink from him.

"Excuse me! I will return in half an hour," said the Curate, and without more ado, drew the girl away, as if anxious to remove her from his companion's observation.

Heeding the bluster of the young man whose insolence he had so summarily punished as little as if it were the barking of a cur, Bowie gazed in wonder after the ill-assorted pair who had so unexpectedly been brought together.

What had the gambler to do with one seemingly so young and pure? Bowie tried to dismiss it as one of the countless paradoxes of life; but while he waited that half hour, the graceful figure haunted his thoughts and sunk him into a pleasant yet half sad reverie.

"Pardon me for leaving you so abruptly. It was a lady of my acquaintance," said the Curate, on his return, speaking as if the circumstance were trivial, yet watching the younger man to see if the impression were as fleeting as he would have it.

"But come!" he added, "I have a tidbit for you. You have not seen Leoline?—at any rate, off the stage?"

"No," replied Bowie, a trifle absently.

"I felicitate myself on the opportunity to give you a pleasure. I have the *entree* of the green-room. Shall we go at once?"

"If you please."

Arm-in-arm they passed along the brilliantly-lighted thoroughfare to a theater in St. Charles street, over the entrance to which was displayed in gigantic letters:

"Mlle. LEOLINE!"

"AS JULIET!"

The actress was gorgeously beautiful, with dark, passionate, voluptuous beauty.

Through that portrayal of melting love, the Curate sat at the elbow of his younger companion, whispering into his ear like a second Memphis, until Bowie's pulse throbbed, his face flushed, and his eye brightened.

Then the tempter said:

"Now, would you like a nearer view?"

"My dear friend," said Bowie, "you lay me under too great obligation!"

"Don't speak of it, my boy," replied the Curate. "If an old stager like me can throw a little pleasure in the way of one on the threshold of life, why should I not?—not to mention that you are a good fellow and deserve well of all your friends. Come!"

Passing through the stage door the Curate nodded familiarly to the people behind the scenes. But at the door of the green-room his progress was obstructed by an odd-looking individual.

## CHAPTER II.

### QUEEN OF THE FOOT-LIGHTS.

It was a youth whose large bones and loose joints gave him a very ungainly appearance. Evidently no razor had ever scraped acquaintance (if we may be permitted the expression) with his virgin cheek, for it was covered with a

yellow fuzz of hair, even lighter than the shock that cropped out from his head.

His dress was composite. On his head he wore a leather spiked-cap or helmet. From one shoulder hung a Spanish cavalier's cloak, incongruous with a Greek blouse beneath. On his legs Roman greaves were bound over the modern pantaloons. For the rest, he grasped the pennant lance of the desert in a mailed glove that no doubt belonged to the ghostly Dane, and bore on his left arm the scalp-fringed shield of the Indian of the plains.

His pompous air was ludicrous in the extreme, as he flourished his lance and cried in a staccato voice:

"What ho, gentlemen! In the name of my most gracious lady, I cry you *hold!*"

"Hello, Sammy! I see you are on duty as usual," said the Curate, smiling.

"Sammy!" cried the soldier, cavalier, shepherd, knight, or what-not, striking his lance against the ground in high dudgeon. "Now, by St. Mark and St. John thou art divorced from thy manners! Thinkest thou the lady Leoline hath in her service a fellow that can be called Sammy? Canst not say 'good Bardolph,' sirrah?"

"Bardolph or Sammy, so that you let us pass," replied the Curate, humoring him.

"That will I not, until I have learned the will of my lady. Remain ye here. I will return anon!"

"Who is this nondescript warden of her ladyship's person?" laughed Bowie, when Sammy, or Bardolph, had disappeared.

"The best-natured fool alive," replied the Curate. "He is delighted if permitted to carry a chair or a table off the stage. When appearing in costume, as a dummy soldier, peasant, or anything under the sun, he feels that the success of the play depends upon him. If the tragedian were to fall sick, to oblige the manager and that the public might not be disappointed, he would offer to play Macbeth, or Richard III."

"Pray ye enter, my lords!" cried Sammy, suddenly throwing wide the door. "Her grace awaits ye!"

Thus adjured, the guests entered, and Leoline received them in a manner which blended the complaisance of a modern coquette with the dignity affected by a stage queen.

As her eyes rested upon Bowie a quick flash of admiration came into them, and with a swift glance she scanned him from head to foot.

The young man experienced a hot thrill, like the intoxicating flush of wine. If this woman was to have any power over him, she would sway him through his baser nature.

Looking on, a smile of evil satisfaction came into the Curate's face. Instinctively he hid his mouth with his hand as he reflected:

"In the full light of this one's beauty he will forget the fleeting impression of that other. How his face lighted up at sight of her! But, ah! he must never cross her path. No! no! she is not for such as he. Sordid as is her present, her future shall be one blaze of splendor! And he—he shall contribute his mite! Ha! ha! so long as I purvey such delicate morsels for his palate, he will be in no mood to scan over-closely the ebb of his gold. Gold! gold!—the god before which all men bow down in worship!"

Aloud he said:

"Sammy, champagne—and without stint."

"What, knave!" cried Sammy to an attendant, "bestir thyself and bear hither the sparkling nectar of the gods—the ambrosial cup that warms the soul with the fire of genius and wings the sluggish tongue with eloquence!"

And this imperial mandate was emphasized by a majestic wave of the hand.

Soon the potent liquid began to flow, and the woman to weave her spell of coquetry; and when the Curate withdrew on some formal excuse, his absence was scarcely noticed.

Flushed with the generous wine and the witcheries of his companion, Bowie raised his brimming glass.

"To Beauty—the royalty to which kings do homage!" he cried; and drained his glass with his eyes fixed meaningly on hers.

The woman gazed into his with her bright eyes, her lips parted, showing her white, even teeth, and a blush mantled her dimpled cheeks. To the eye she seemed to revel in his admiration. He did not know that it was a piece of finished acting, and that the soft color was brought to her cheeks by a voluntary effort, partly by holding her breath.

Then she matched his gallantry.

"To Valor!—the kingly attribute before which Beauty gladly bows!" she replied.

Once more her eye ran over his magnificent figure with so meaning a glance that its course seemed traced in fire.

The man's hand fell upon that of the siren, and closed with a gripe that almost hurt her. His eyes flashed and his cheeks flushed, as he bent forward with words of passion trembling on his lips.

Dextrously the actress withdrew her hand from his, and rose, touching a bell which stood on the table.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, in dulcet cadences, "but my hour for retiring is come, and I have to be thus rigid, with even my best friends. The life of an actress is wearing at best, and I know that you would not ask me to break a rule which my health so imperatively demands. See! you have been so entertaining that I have let you run ten minutes over the hour."

In the doorway of the green-room Bowie clasped in both of his the hand the lady extended to him, and said:

"At least, you will permit me to see you again soon?"

"You must curry favor with his Reverence," said Leoline, smiling at the Curate, who now made his appearance. "I give you leave to come as often as he will bring you."

And with a lingering smile she dismissed him, closing the door.

The Curate put his arm through that of his companion, and Bowie would have walked blindly out of the play-house, but the former whispered:

"By the way, we are forgetting the wine bill!"

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, placing his pocket-book in the hand of the other. "Will you oblige me by attending to it?"

A minute later they were walking in the cool night air, and the Curate said:

"Well, is she not a queen?"

But Bowie was so engrossed in thought that he either did not hear or heed the question.

A crafty smile overspread the gambler's face.

"He has forgotten that other," he muttered, "and is ripe for my sickle. Ha! ha! the golden grain!—the golden grain!"

That night Bowie scarcely knew whether he lost or won; but the Curate was well informed on the subject, and as he crinkled the crisp notes and chinked the coin his craft transferred from the pockets of the younger man to his own, he muttered:

"For thee, sweet Miriam!—all for thee!"

While Bowie was taking leave of Leoline in the door of the green-room, a man standing in the shadow of the wings was watching them.

A look of jealousy clouded his face, and a single ejaculation escaped his lips.

"Ah!"

## CHAPTER III.

### BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

THE man who from the wings of the stage had observed Leoline's parting with James Bowie, was, perhaps, forty years of age, with that build which gives a dignified carriage without warranting the epithet corpulent.

He was dressed in black, a large diamond in his shirt-bosom, being the only attempt at ornamentation.

His hair curling close to his head and his wiry mustachios and imperial indicated that he was a Frenchman; yet he had a hard, calculating self-possession altogether uncharacteristic of that volatile nation.

Where an ordinary Frenchman would have rushed forth with distracted upbraids of jealous fury, M. Raoul de Calignay stood with lowering brows, gnawing his mustache and twisting his imperial, and muttered in a deep, guttural voice:

"Ah!"

When the Curate and Bowie were gone, M. de Calignay emerged from the stage wings, walking with a slow, firm step.

At sight of him the good Bardolph drew himself up as if on parade, and screwing his mouth to one side, executed a bugle flourish like a veritable herald.

An impatient frown from M. de Calignay, however, cut short the youth's mimicry, and with a rather crestfallen air he stepped to one side.

The Frenchman walked straight to the green-room door and knocked an imperious summons.

A voice called:

"Entrez!" (enter.)

M. de Calignay swung wide the door, entered, and closed it behind him.

Every motion was marked by that assertion of authority which is prompted by displeasure.

A smile of welcome lighted the actress's face, and a flush of pleasure mantled her cheek, as she advanced with light step to receive her guest.



But the smile faded into a look of questioning anxiety, as she detected his mood.

"What has annoyed you, Raoul?" she asked, and would have placed her hands on his shoulders; but he waved her back.

"I pray you to be seated, ma'm'selle. I assure you, your kind solicitude is appreciated—at ze true valuation!" sneered the Frenchman, with cutting politeness.

At this rebuff the woman drew back with haughty surprise.

"It is monsieur's humor to be displeased with me," she said, evidently at a loss to account for his mood.

"Verefore?" sneered the Frenchman.

"I know of no cause."

"*Allons!* Ma'm'selle is just from ze caresses of her lover—a *bagatelle!*"—(and the Frenchman spread his fingers, shrugged his shoulders, canted his head to one side, arched his brows and drew down the corners of his mouth in a grimace of intense irony)—"has she note the same smile for me?"

"Pray explain yourself. I have but one lover, and you know it."

"Ze fair-hair Apollo who has just left your presence—*parbleu!* he is not'ing."

The woman smiled.

"You need feel no concern on his account. I never saw him until an hour ago."

"And from look, vord and gesture, one would think you have known each other for year!"

A rippling laugh, the genuine mirthfulness of which could not be questioned, issued from the actress's lips.

"I assure you the love, if any, is all on his side," she said. "He is a young idiot whom the Curate brought, to further his own purposes—and I need give you no light on that head. I enjoy his champagne, and repay him in smiles that cost nothing. The Curate then fleeces him at cards, which obviates the necessity of you lending the old sharper the wherewithal to gratify his insane passion for gambling. So we make, all round—don't you see? Come, Raoul! you know me too well to entertain so senseless a jealousy. Sit down and I will coax you into good humor."

With playful force she pushed him into a chair, then sat down in his lap, twined her warm arms about his neck, and with a passionate tenderness that would have convinced a satyr that he was beloved, kissed him on either cheek, and lastly on the lips.

"Therel!" she exclaimed. "Can you doubt me?"

The man gazed upon the wealth of beauty, all pulsing with warm life, there within the circle of his arm, and his cheek flushed and his eye lighted.

"I am an infernal fool!" he exclaimed.

"You were, but under my treatment you are convalescing rapidly," laughed Leoline.

"However, I do not like ze idea of our good friend ze Curate using you for such a purpose."

"Where is the harm? He makes money by the operation, and I get good company and good wine."

"Good company, no doubt!" with a grimace.

"What! are you going to have a relapse?"

"Not while you look at me like zis!"

"And do I ever look at you otherwise, my king?"

She brought her face, all aglow with passionate love, close to his, so that he could feel her warm breath on his cheek, and with her lustrous eyes gazing into his.

It was sweet flattery, and he smiled fondly back at her as he replied:

"It always comes to ze same thing with you. I surrender at discretion. All ze same, I hate ze Curate and his friends."

"His Reverence is, or will be, valuable to you."

"Zerefore I tolerate him."

"What is the value of the estate to which he is heir?"

"A quarter of a million pounds sterling!"

"A million and a quarter of our money! Ah! what rare jewels that would buy!"

"A woman's appreciation!"

"But would you not have me beautiful?"

"You are sufficiently beautiful now, *ma belle!*"

"Beauty unadorned! I hate it! And if he got all this money, he would lavish it on that white-livered little hypocrite, Miriam!"

"To ze last penny!"

"Bah! I hate her, with her baby face and innocent ways!"

"Beauties seldom admire each other!"

"She a beauty! Dare you compare her with me?"

A flush of jealous antipathy dyed the actress's cheek.

"Certainly she is not beautiful as you are beautiful."

"There is not enough of her, and her blood is as cold and thin as ice-water! Jewels would be thrown away on her skinny arms and neck and bosom! Ha! ha! who would adorn a skeleton? I tell you I hate her! and before she should triumph over me thus, I would tear the gems from her person with my own hand!"

In her jealous fury the actress raised her clenched right hand, and shadowed by passion her beauty appeared in its most terrible aspect.

"If you could act like zat," cried M. de Calignay, "you would make ze Lucretia Borgia adorable!"

Not heeding the compliment conveyed by look as well as word, the woman kept on:

"Why does not this dolt of a father get this gold that is his by right?"

"It can be got only by due process of law, and law is ze expensive luxury. When he shall break a pharo bank, it is his purpose to undertake ze procurement of zis money. Zen Miriam shall roll in luxury, to make up for all ze privation. It is ze dream of his life."

"Never to be realized! Raoul, that money must be yours."

"Ours, *ma belle!*"

"Ah! do you love me so?"

"What can I have apart from you?"

With a smile of gratification the woman laid her cheek against his.

"And what have you done to make this money ours, Raoul?" she asked, fondly dwelling on the word that identified their fortunes.

"I have lent him money from time to time, of which he keeps no account, and hold his acknowledgments for a hundred times ze money actually advanced."

"But this could cover only a small portion of his immense fortune."

"True. In addition, he must make me his agent in zis business; and it will be strange if some of ze gold do not stick to my finger!"

"Raoul, I want it all! I shall grudge every cent that goes to the little psalm-singer! What does *she* want with riches?"

"Well! well! we shall see! We have ample time to plot, and Quirk is ze living compendium of legal trickery."

"Quirk?"

"A dog of a lawyer, to whom I say—'Come!'—and he comes—'Go!' and he goes. 'Lie down in yonder mud-puddle zat I may walk across dry-shod on your worthless carcass!'—and flop down he goes."

"And you can trust him?"

"So long as I keep his neck in a noose. He has ze exaggerated terror of prison walls; and a word from me would commit him to an apartment five by eight, with white-washed walls and furniture which makes up for scantiness by being substantial."

"Ah! how I hate her!" persisted Leoline.

"If you can rob her of every penny, I will repay you by a warmer love, if possible!"

The day following that on which the foregoing dialogue took place was Sunday. The gay city did not close her theaters. In fact the Sabbath was rather a gala day.

As Leoline came from the stage the last time that night, Bardolph presented her with an exquisite bouquet.

"It is from Miss Miriam," he said. "Though the harsh will of her stern parent denies her the pleasure of witnessing thy triumphs, yet is her heart with thee. And this day hath her love for thee led her to gather this slight tribute in the wildwood."

"Oh! I am delighted!" cried the actress, receiving the bouquet with all the outward manifestations of grateful pleasure. "How kind and thoughtful of her. But, Sammy, we know no one else half so sweet—do we?"

The face of the youth lighted up with an expression that attested his devoted love for Miriam.

"Leo!" he cried, forgetting his pomposity in honest delight, "she is an angel, and you're a brick to say so!"

"Thank you for your comparison, Master Bardolph!" cried the actress, flushing scarlet with chagrin in spite of herself.

"Oh! I didn't mean," began Sammy, floundering in confusion.

"Therel! Of course not. Shut the door, please."

When she had thus dismissed him, she held the bouquet at arm's-length and glaring at it, cried:

"Hah! if I could treat you as my hatred prompts, I would trample you to atoms under my feet!"

But, nevertheless, she put it in a vase with

such care that not one of its petals was disturbed.

And what of Miriam? Let us see.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE PICNIC.

In a retired street in the French quarter of the Crescent City, where rents are cheap, stands a house of as little pretensions as any in the row. Ascending to the third flat, we knock at a door which has a neat carpet rug before it, and are admitted by a girl whose delicate beauty impresses us like a poem. Everything about her person is in perfect taste, though the material of her dress indicates poverty.

We being invisible, her glad smile of welcome is bestowed on the great hulking fellow who came up the stairs after us three at a time, she thinking that it was he who knocked.

"Are you ready, Miss Miriam?" he cries, taking both her hands, and grinning in extravagant delight. "Such a day was ne'er vouchsafed for Cleopatra and her Antony! The very birds seem to know when you're coming."

"Nonsense, Sammy!" laughed the girl. "One would think you an old beau, by your flattery. Here is the basket."

Sammy followed her into the room, which was a paradise of neatness, albeit everything indicated much care and slight expense.

"Fair priestess of this enchanted realm," cried Sammy, "this basket's weight would scarce vex thy dainty arm. My little finger suffices for the task of bearing it!"

"It's a pity we haven't more to put in it, Sammy; but when my ship comes in I'll load you down with good things," said the girl, pleasantly, though a slight shade passed over her face.

"Out upon my scurvy tongue!" cried the youth, in melodramatic remorse. "I'll swear that this goodly hamper holds what would provision an army, and groan beneath the burden. Ugh! ugh!"—putting the picnic basket on his shoulder, and pretending to totter under it. "Miss Miriam, you are Her Majesty, the Queen, and I am your Lord Purveyor!"

"I will make you Warden, also, and Keeper of the Great Key of State, if you will lock the door," laughed the girl, all her cheerfulness coming back.

"I hear but to obey! But first I suggest that you scan my apparel, and see that I do Your Majesty proper honor."

The girl ran her eye over his dress which had been much simplified in accordance with her suggestions. Sammy had sacrificed everything that his heart held dearest, save a flaming-red neck-tie and an enormous glass brilliant in his shirt-bosom.

"Oh! you'll do splendid! Come on, for we haven't a minute of this glorious day to waste."

And the girl ran lightly down the stairs.

"Tis a day for a princess's bridal; and I hope it will put some roses in your pale cheeks before night."

"Don't croak, Sammy; I'm the picture of robust health, and you know it."

"Yes, if sitting up until after midnight over your needle can add to good health. What would the Curate say if he knew?"

"Hush! or I'll have you beheaded for high treason! Who could grumble on such a day as this? Just look at the sky! Oh! I never was so happy!"

"Well, I'm done. And here comes our car. What, ho! charioteer! rein in thy chafing steeds! Her Majesty would ride in grand triumphal procession. All these are Your Highness's royal subjects, who ride with you at five cents a head!"

Although it was Sunday—or, better, because it was Sunday, the streets of the gay city were fast filling with pedestrians, and the car which Sammy's fancy converted into a royal chariot was crowded with pleasure-seekers, bound for the picnic grounds lying to the north of the city.

More than one face relaxed with a smile of admiration for the flower-like beauty of the girl, in such marked contrast with the ungainliness of her escort.

But one pedestrian stopped short in his hurried walk, with a sharp ejaculation:

"Ah!"

James Bowie, whose very dreams had been invaded by visions of Leoline's voluptuous beauty, and who had risen to walk off in the cool morning air the fever that throbbed through his veins, came to a dead halt and felt the blood recede on his heart at sight of Miriam, in everything so different.

The night before he had seen only her figure; now her face was revealed in all its classic purity of outline. Its perfect oval was framed in



brown hair that fell in natural waves, each thread of that exquisite fineness often marked in the intellectual type of woman. Her lips were not full, like Leoline's; but delicate and perfectly chiseled. Her eyes were a soft, constant gray. Her skin was pure white, with that pallor which shows blue veins on the temples, giving her an aspect of almost saintly purity.

All this Bowie added to that willowy grace of figure which had caught his attention the night before, and the spell of the enchantress, Leoline, was broken!

This appealed to all that was highest in his nature, bringing restfulness and peace; that perturbed his soul with the mania of passion. Miriam bore with her the atmosphere of home, with all that haloes heaven-approved wifehood and motherhood—the smiles and prattle of children, the croon of the lullaby song, the cool hand pressed lovingly on the throbbing brow, and the low voice of prayer. Leoline suggested only the glare of blazing chandeliers, the clink of wine-glasses, and the heartless laughter of revelry.

With a swelling of the heart and a sense of the unworthiness of his life, James Bowie got on the rear platform of the car, standing so that Miriam could not see him among the crowd.

"It must be she," he mused. "The same form—the same walk. There cannot be two like her. What is she doing with these theater people and this old gambler? This is the lout I saw at the green-room door. And she is so pure and so superior to them all! I wish I could get her out of such company."

"Bah! what am I, to put on airs with her friends? It is the pot calling the kettle black! I, a slave smuggler, and gambler to boot!"

Standing there amid that laughing, chatting crowd of pleasure-seekers, the man looked back over his past life, and there were passages dark enough to contrast painfully with the ideal he had built up of the young girl whose name even as yet was unknown to him.

Meanwhile, the subject of his thoughts was seated in the car, where her frail beauty had induced a young man to offer her his seat.

Sammy stood in the center of the car, hanging onto the straps, so that his coat-sleeves slipped down, exposing his lank arms almost to the elbow. Bending to whisper in Miriam's ear, he amused himself and her by giving characters to the other occupants of the car.

One corpulent old lady, who fanned herself in a manner that suggested to his grotesque fancy the flapping of an elephant's ear, he called the Queen Dowager. Some pretty girls were maids in waiting. A tall, dark-looking man with a Mephistophelean frown, was the headsman. And so on.

But when the picnic ground was reached, his delight knew no bounds.

"Alight, fair princess!" he cried. "Thy bower is carpeted with velvet moss, and decked with jasmynes, acacias and magnolias! A hidden choir is waiting to regale thee with its minstrelsy! All nature cries: *Welcome! Welcome! thrice welcome to our Queen!*"

Miriam flushed scarlet with embarrassment as Sammy handed her from the car, his enthusiastic address drawing all eyes upon her. Many smiled approval, as if ready to indorse Sammy's sentiments; but the girl was glad to escape their scrutiny, and so hastened away, murmuring:

"Oh, Sammy! you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

So began the bright day, when one whose head and heart often ached with weary labor and anxiety put her care aside for the hour, and sought the balm that only nature can give.

The trees with their swaying floral censers, the birds with gay plumage and mellow notes, the busy insects, and most of all the blue sky with its silent cloud-ships borne to unknown harbors under the distant horizon, were full of delight for her. Standing on the verge of the picnic ground and looking toward the swamp, the deep, dark wood was a realm of mystery, and her fancy traversed its secret retreats with a sense of awe.

To escape the scrutiny of strangers, Miriam penetrated the wood that skirted the general picnic ground to a silvan nook shut in from observation. Here she spread a snowy tablecloth, and arranged on it, with her peculiar taste, the simple repast that Sammy dignified by the name of the "the royal banquet."

It consisted of bread and butter, some cold meat, a simple cake, a glass of jelly, and fruits—that was all; yet so set off was it with flowers and mosses that she and Sammy gathered, that it looked like a fairy feast.

"Ho! all ye spirits of circumambient air!"

cried Sammy, "gather round our festal board! Bear high your brimming beakers—"

"One moment, Sammy," interrupted the girl. "Do you know?—we haven't anything to put in the beakers! As we can't afford wine, suppose you get some water? Don't you remember?—we passed a barrellful in the center of the grounds."

"Mistress Miriam," replied Sammy, "your word is my law. Ariel's self could not be more fleet than I; and this silver urn"—picking up a tin-pail—"shall bear my liquid treasure!"

"Sammy, you are too bad for anything!" laughed the girl, merrily. "See that you remember to rinse your silver urn. Now, hurry!"

"Madam, I will away!"

And Sammy went as he had seen pages withdraw from the stage.

Left to herself, and viewing her banquet-spread critically, Miriam concluded that its decoration would be perfect if she had a few more ferns.

With her, execution followed quick upon conception; and with a light step she set out for the plants she required. The quest of them took her deeper into the wood toward the swamp, and their exquisite beauty carried her from group to group, as each presented some real or fancied superiority.

She had thus wandered further than she intended, and had her arms full of herbal trophies, when she heard a sound like a child crying.

Instantly the mother nature in her was aroused, and with a look of anxiety she murmured:

"Oh! some little one has wandered away and got lost!"

The sound was in the direction of the swamp, and too quick of sympathy to take thought of self or to fear the shadows of the dark wood she hastened toward it.

Where she had now penetrated few flowers grew, since the vines and mosses, densely interwoven among the tree-tops, shut out the sunlight; and the birds that sailed through the somber aisles looked like bats.

In spite of the obstructions in her path—and the creepers clung to her dress as if loth to let her pass—the girl hastened forward, until she came to a spectacle that froze the blood in her veins.

In an open glade, where a bayou set in from the swamp, crouched a huge alligator, not less than fifteen feet in length!

Too late Miriam remembered that this treacherous reptile is known to use a cry similar to that of a child as a decoy.

At sight of her the monster thrashed the herbage with his tail, and, with a speed that would have out-stripped her running on an unobstructed course, charged her with open jaws!

## CHAPTER V.

"YOU MUST NOT KNOW ME!"

"DODGE to one side! He cannot follow you. Dodge to one side, I say!"

Led by the subtle fascination of this girl's pure beauty, in such marked contrast with that of the siren who had so perturbed his passionate nature, James Bowie had followed Miriam, to be at hand in her time of sore need.

With one terrified glance in his direction the girl did as he bade her, narrowly escaping the jaws that opened like a huge trap.

The clumsy monster turned, but a bold man stood between it and its prey, and thrust a cudgel into the yawning throat. The iron jaws closed upon it with a snap, crunching it to atoms, but the reptile recoiled painfully wounded.

Instantly Bowie turned, caught the terrified girl in his arms, and bounded away with her to a tree, where he set her in safety among the branches, and turned to meet the foe that was charging him furiously.

As he had directed Miriam, he now sprung to one side, and, as the alligator passed, leaped upon its back.

Taken thus at a disadvantage, the ungainly monster sought to cast its bold rider, by rushing hither and thither, forward and backward, and by lashing its tail. But the scale armor of this weapon prevents its near approach to the back, and Bowie could crouch beneath its sweep and laugh at the vain attempts of the reptile to reach him.

Failing in every effort, the alligator would have plunged into the bayou, and, in its own element, become master; but, catching up a handful of mud, Bowie plastered it over the creature's eyes, and the formidable monster stopped short, utterly helpless.

Dismounting from his strange steed, which

now stood perfectly motionless, Bowie went to its head, and taking fair aim, discharged his pistol into one of its eyes, then leaped out of danger.

The dying convulsions of the monster were terrible, and under the lash of its tail the rank vegetation was torn as if by a whirlwind. It lasted but a moment, however, when death still-ed all.

And now he was the recipient of her thanks. And she was a famous hero worshiper, with her clinging ways, her soft voice, and her clear, searching eyes.

The man whom a wild beast could not daunt was so embarrassed by the gratitude of this simple, pure-hearted girl that he almost hailed Sammy's unmusical voice with a feeling of relief.

"What, ho! What, ho! What, ho! Hath jealous Fate torn my mistress from me? Yield her back, oh, ye dryads and satyrs!"

"Oh, Sammy!" cried Miriam, with a sudden smile of delight; and turning to her companion, added in her usual tone: "It is a friend who came with me."

"Hail! all hail, most sovereign lady! I thought—"

"Sammy, this gentleman has just saved my life!"

"Just done what?" asked the youth, staring blankly from one to the other.

"Just saved my life! I was attacked by an alligator! See—there it lies dead."

Sammy gazed at the dead reptile in white-lipped awe, then with deep emotion addressed Bowie:

"Sir, if it would repay you in any degree for what you have done, I would lay down my hands for you to walk upon!"

"Oh, Sammy! that is so like you!" murmured Miriam, resting her cheek against his arm and raising her tearful eyes to his face.

"That boy is no fool," reflected Bowie, recalling his introduction to him at the green-room door. "There was never more genuine pathos than in his voice and look now."

With a respect which a moment before he would not have thought possible, he grasped the youth's hand.

While James Bowie recovered his knife, which he had dropped in his novel ride, this dialogue passed rapidly between Miriam and Sammy:

"Do you suppose He would object to him?"

"What! the man who has just saved your life?"

"That was why I asked. That must make a difference."

"I should think so!"

"I want to ask him to lunch with us."

"Of course. Why not?"

The invitation was extended, and accepted more gladly than she knew.

In spite of herself, Miriam could not appear at ease, and to draw attention from her, Sammy brought forward his most extravagant conceits.

Through his fancy the snowy bread became ambrosia, the water nectar, and himself a male Hebe, the cup-bearer of the gods.

It was after the repast was over that he made his most unlucky speech.

"Methinks, my lord, I have met thee before, when the Castle of the Lady Leoline was honored by thy presence."

"Yes," said Bowie, "and I have also had the honor of being of slight service to Miss Miriam on a former occasion."

"To me?" exclaimed the girl.

"No longer ago than last night, before the St. Charles Hotel. Are you not the same?"

"And you are the gentleman who—"

The girl turned pale and seemed to shrink from him in affright.

"I beg your pardon for recalling an unpleasant occurrence," said Bowie, not a little chagrined at his *faux pas*.

"It is not that," said Miriam, evidently in great distress and perplexity; "but I cannot—Oh! how can I tell you, when I owe you so much? I did not know that you were the gentleman who protected me from insult. I did not see you then, so that I could not recognize you to-day. And now you will think me so ungrateful—"

"I beg that you will dismiss the whole subject from your thoughts."

"But I must tell you. And, oh! indeed it is a matter over which I have no control! And you will not think me ungrateful?" cried the girl, taking his hand in hers and raising her tearful eyes appealingly to his face.

"No," said Bowie, gravely, "I will not think you ungrateful."

"Well, I must make a request which will seem strange to you, and yet I cannot explain."



Our acquaintance must stop here and now, and you must not try to find out who I am, nor appear to know me, if we meet by accident. Oh! I know that you feel hurt!"

"Go on," said Bowie, striving to conceal the pain which was far deeper than she imagined, because it sprang from a different source.

"And you must never speak of what has occurred to-day, nor must Sammy. Oh! will you forgive me? Indeed! indeed! I do appreciate all that I owe you, and the shameful return I am making—"

"Say no more, I beg of you. Of course your motives are correct. I do not seek to know them. You may rely on my discretion. And now, since my presence is painful to you, I will bid you good-by."

"Oh! how can I let you go like this?"

"I know what you feel, and that is sufficient for me. Good-by."

He bowed and was gone.

"Why, what is it all about?" asked Sammy, as the girl sunk on the ground in tears.

"Sammy, father saw me on the street last night, returning from the delivery of work that had to be taken home. Before the St. Charles a man attempted to stop me, and Mr. Bowie pushed him aside. Father was furious about it. I thought he would curse me. He forbade me ever to appear in the street again unattended, after dark, on any pretext whatever. He seemed terribly afraid that I should form the acquaintance of Mr. Bowie, though I assured him that I had not seen his face and should not know him if I were to meet him. But he persisted, and commanded me, if the gentleman ever sought me out, to have nothing to do with him. And now I have obeyed!"

"Miriam," said the boy, with questioning concern in his eyes, "why is your father so determined that you shall form no acquaintances among gentlemen—or any one else, for that matter?"

"I don't know, Sammy; our day is spoilt. Let us go home."

But Sammy was a better and wiser friend than that. By argument and persuasion he kept her out with nature until the shadows of the tropical night began to fall; and when again they found themselves amid the stir and bustle of the crowded city, the thoroughfares were ablaze with light from the shop windows and the entrances of places of amusement.

As they ascended the dark stairway to Miriam's home (lights are a luxury in cheap lodgings!) they became aware that some one was hurriedly pacing the floor.

"It is the Curate!" whispered Sammy, and immediately added: "I beg your pardon!—your father."

"Oh! he is in one of his moods to night!" reflected the girl, with quickening heart-beats.

To Sammy she whispered:

"Let me go in alone. Here is the bouquet for Leoline. Good-night."

"I wish I could help you!" said the youth, wistfully.

"No! no! you cannot. Good-night!"

"Good-night."

Reluctantly he turned, after pressing her hand, and slowly went back down the steps.

Her heart swelling with grateful affection, the girl listened until his footsteps died away, then opened the door and entered her home.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SLAVE OF A PASSION.

THE Curate was pacing the room, striking his hands together excitedly, with flushed face and flashing eyes. Old age seemed to have fallen from him like a discarded mantle.

"Ah! these dingy walls—how I hate them!" he muttered. "They are stealing the beauty from your cheeks, like flowers blooming in the shade. Your home should and shall be hung with silken tapestry, carpeted with Indian rugs, and decorated with all that the world holds of beauty. Ah! Miriam, my darling, the night of sorrow and privation is past—the resplendent dawn of happiness and luxury is at hand."

Is it invoked by his impassioned apostrophe, the girl entered the room.

"Father!"

"My dear child!"

With genuine affection he took both her hands and kissed her on the brow. And she smiled lovingly, yet sadly, her eyes humid with deprecating pity.

"What! tears?" cried the Curate—"tears, when all is to be sunshine and happiness!—tears, when you are to have your house in town and your villa in the country!—tears, when you are to roll in your carriage on the boulevard, and dazzle the world of fashion with the splendor of

your diamonds at the ceremonial ball!—tears, when your every wish is to be catered to, and the world is to be at your feet!—tears—"

"Father, stop!—oh, stop!" sighed the girl. "Why will you not abandon this vain dream?"

"Dream? Ay, it has been but a dream! But to-night comes the awakening to a glorious realization!—to-night comes the full fruition of the hope that has eluded us through years and years of weary struggling and sickening defeat!"

"To-night for the first time in my life, everything conspires in my favor. The bank has not had a reverse for thirteen weeks—after my unparalleled run of ill-luck, to-night is my thirteenth day of sequestration from the faro-table—to test the return of my luck, I tried dice this afternoon and threw triplet sixes three times in succession, followed by a throw of thirteen—and there is another coincidence of which I need not speak just now."

"By the way you told me that you delivered some work last night?"

"Yes," replied the girl faintly.

"For which you received?"

"Twenty dollars."

"Ah! so much? Why, that's a little fortune for these tiny hands to make! How sad that they should ever have to work for money! But never mind—they shall be covered with diamonds, before the year is out, to the amount of twenty times twenty dollars!"

"Miriam, I have an idea. You have no use for the money to-night. Lend it to me until to-morrow, and I will square it for you. Then you can buy your own jewels. Just think!—how many belles can point to their gems, and say that the fingers earned their own adornment?"

"But, father," objected the girl, pale with distress, "our rent is overdue, and must be paid to-morrow."

"Rent!" cried the gambler, loftily; "to-morrow I shall have money enough to rent the grandest palace in all New Orleans!"

"But you might fail; and I would rather go without the gems than run such a risk."

The pleading of the girl, endeavoring to keep her scant earnings without wounding the vanity of her parent, was pathetic beyond description.

"But, child, I cannot fail!" cried the Curate. "In twelve hours you may just as well have a hundred dollars for every one you have now."

"And there is the provision-dealer. I could only get him to continue our credit by showing him the work, and assuring him that I would pay him in full to-morrow."

"What!" cried the Curate, furiously indignant, "does the scurvy knave dare to question my ability and readiness to meet my household expenses? Must my daughter stand my surety? See! I could buy and sell a score of such rascals!"

And drawing a long pocket-book from his inner vest pocket, the Curate displayed before the astonished eyes of his daughter a package of bank bills that made her clasp her hands and cry:

"Oh, father!"

"That," cried the Curate, dramatically, "is but the seedling from which is to spring a colossal fortune—such a fortune as the world has never seen!"

He pushed Miriam from his knee and arose, as he spread the money out on the table; then, swelling with enthusiasm in contemplation of the vast operations he had marked out for the future, continued speaking with gestures, as if delivering an address.

"I may as well tell you all, now that success is so near at hand. Do you think that I shall be content with the million dollars more or less, that I shall get out of this inheritance? No! every third man you meet on change has a million! I will not stop short of a money power that shall sway the destinies of nations!"

"With a million dollars at command I can and will crush every faro bank in America! By that time the world will ring with my name, and I shall have to assail the strongholds of Europe—Baden-Baden and the rest—*incognito*. But they cannot and shall not escape!"

"When I have no more fields to conquer in this direction, I shall have amassed wealth which will make me a veritable Monte-Cristo. Then I will go into the great money centers of the world, and take part in those operations around which is thrown a veil of legitimacy, though everybody knows they are but gambling by another name. Here, gray-headed gold magnates, before whom all the world has bowed as demi-gods, will be but ripe grain before my sickle!"

"Ha! ha!—the world shall own me king!"

With tears streaming from her eyes, the girl

put her arms about him, and with her head nestled against his breast and her eyes raised pleadingly to his, cried:

"Oh, father! father! stop!—do stop!"

"And you," he continued, not heeding her, but taking her face between his palms and gazing into it with eyes that blazed with excitement—"you shall be instrumental in this grand consummation! With your twenty dollars and ten that Calignay has promised me I shall have thirteen hundred! Is it not fate? *Thirteen hundred dollars!* Have you marked me?—the thirteen weeks of uninterrupted success on the part of the bank (gathering gold to swell my coffers!)—my thirteen days of sequestration from the faro-table—thirteen by the dice—and now (what I avoided speaking of a moment ago) *thirteen hundred dollars!* All in thirteens!—an unlucky number; but the bank leads with its thirteen weeks of luck, hence the number is unlucky for the bank—LUCKY FOR ME! Girl, get me the money!"

"Father, use what you have, if you will, but leave me the little sum that is to pay for our food to-morrow!"

"No, that makes the sum complete. One defective link in the chain, and all might fail. Shall we risk the loss of millions for a paltry twenty dollars?"

"It is all that we have!"

"Peace! Get me the money at once—I command you!"

She had never disobeyed him. With the prospect of being homeless and hungry on the morrow, she crossed the room on leaden feet, unlocked a drawer in the dresser, and handed him her little purse.

Then she sunk into a chair with her head on the table, and burst into tears.

With greedy eyes the gambler counted over the little sum of money, and added it to his greater amount, then put the empty purse on the table.

"Miriam," he said, gently drawing the girl's head upon his breast, and removing her hands from her tear-wet face, "every tear is a reproach to me. Do you doubt my love?"

Before she could answer he suddenly cried:

"Hark! there is a step in the lower hall! It is Calignay's! Miriam, he must not see you in tears. Retire to your room. My child, do not leave me the recollection of that sad face. It is enough to reverse my luck at the very moment of success. Cannot you smile?"

She smiled—oh! so sadly!—as she stood on tip-toe to kiss him. Then she glided from the room, and M. de Calignay was admitted.

From that interview the gambler came forth with the round sum of thirteen hundred dollars hugged to his breast with savage energy. There was a dizzy swimming sensation of the head, a smell of blood in his nostrils, a humming sound in his ears, and dark spots floating before his vision. He stood on the threshold of his great destiny—so he thought!

On his part, the wily Frenchman held a promissory note bearing Arthur Wingate's signature, and the amount left blank!

Reader, let me show you a picture which will tell its own sad story.

Imagine, if you please, a long, brilliantly-lighted saloon, with tessellated floor, mirrored walls, and frescoed ceiling, supported by slender Corinthian columns and hung with chandeliers that are masses of glittering crystal.

About one of the many elaborately-carved tables are grouped all the men in the room save those whose duties hold them elsewhere. On this table are piles of bank-notes and gold and silver coin which a croupier is in the act of raking into the coffers of the "bank."

Midway on one side of the table sits a man small in stature, dressed in speckless broadcloth and immaculate linen, with no article of jewelry anywhere visible on his person. The most marked characteristic of the man is slipperiness.

His hair, scant in growth, is parted in the middle, and brushed until it seems to hide his scalp with not more than the thickness of a sheet of paper. His beardless face and hands as fair as any woman's, seem slippery to the touch. His small, restless eyes wear the sign manual of insincerity. When he speaks, which is seldom, and always in a low voice, the words seem to glide from his tongue.

As he sits now, perfectly motionless, his livid pallor makes him look like a man of putty, only his eyes glitter like those of a snake, and there are lines about the corners of the mouth and the nostrils which remind one of a wild beast just about to show its teeth.

This is Jerry Cam., the faro-banker.

A moment ago, after loss upon loss in uninter-



rupted succession, until the fortune he had spent years in amassing hung upon the turn of a single card, his face was as impassive as it is now, after that card has been turned and he knows that not only is his fortune secure, but he had added thousands of dollars to it in this one night.

The faces about the table are stamped with the pallor and awe that mark the presence of a great tragedy. One man stands with a look of almost helpless imbecility in his clammy face and the stoop of decrepitude in his frame. With dazed incredulity he watches the rake of the croupier sweep away his money, and with it all his mad hopes.

For an hour it seemed as if he were destined to break the bank of the great Jerry Camp, until men swore that he was the "Favorite of Fortune," and rushed in to place their mites beside his colossal stake, and partake in his success. Calm in unshaken confidence in his great destiny, he doubled his stake every turn of the cards, until the crash came that overwhelmed him with ruin.

The Curate has failed! He is a beggar!

Suddenly, without warning, he falls forward on the table, and so slips to the floor, to lie an inanimate heap!

## CHAPTER VII.

### A DESOLATED HOME.

In the gray of the morning Jerry Camp sat in his private office, in a quandary what to do with the Curate, who lay in a dull stupor in one of the rooms attached to the establishment. Three-fourths of the sporting world had a street acquaintance with the gambler, but no one knew anything more about him, or who were his friends.

But the dilemma adjusted itself when a stranger appeared before the faro-bank.

He bowed with his left hand behind him, under the skirt of his coat, and thrust a card, held between the first and middle fingers of his right, at Jerry Camp, as if about to prod him with it. The card, greasy and grimed and frayed at the edges with long service, was disreputable and unwholesome in the extreme.

The man was quite as disreputable in appearance as his card.

He wore a crush hat which had long outlived its palmy days. His coat of alpaca had evidently seen service as an office coat, since the left sleeve bore unmistakable evidences of having been used as a pen-wiper. It was buttoned close about the throat, a handkerchief, not overly clean, being superadded. The two suggested a soiled shirt and no collar. His pantaloons of black cassimere, evidently sustained by one suspender, hung slovenly about his feet, to be frayed and dragged with dirt. In keeping with everything that pertained to their wearer, his shoes were run over at the heels.

Under his arm he carried a bag, such as lawyers use, suggesting rather than preserving its original green color.

So much for externals. The man himself was a wizened-faced, gimlet-eyed little sharper, so mean that it seemed as if his soul grudged his bones enough flesh to cover them. His voice, when he spoke, was thin, as if air were an expensive commodity, or the speaker were trying to economize lung-force by using only half a one.

His style of delivery was of the "spread eagle" order. He was always addressing an imaginary jury.

Jerry Camp's visitor introduced himself thus: "Ezreth Quirk, Esq.—at your service, sir!—Attorney and Counselor-at-Law, Room 49, (fourth floor), No. 7 Court House Place:—retained, sir, in the interests of one Arthur Wingate, gentleman of leisure, otherwise known—and doubtless to you, sir—as 'the Curate.' I am advised, gentlemen of the— (Ah! I beg your pardon, sir! but habit is a hard master, is it not, sir?) I have received notification—ah—*informally*—that my client is now lying on your premises, smitten by the hand of Divine Providence; and my business here, sir, is to effect a transfer to the bosom of his afflicted family. No doubt, sir, you will be glad to cooperate with me in the matter."

Jerry Camp received the lawyer's card, taking it gingerly between his finger and thumb by the cleanest-looking corner, glanced at it, ascertained that Mr. Quirk had quoted its inscription *verbatim*, and placed it on the edge of the table, where it could not soil anything by contact.

We may remark in passing that, before leaving the spot, Ezreth Quirk, Esq., stealthily repossessed himself of the card, to do service on future occasions.

"I will have a carriage called immediately.

at my own expense," said the faro banker. "I am sorry that the occasion for it should have occurred. I thank you for relieving me from an embarrassing position."

With some difficulty the Curate was got into the landau which Jerry Camp procured for his accommodation.

Ezreth Quirk followed, waved his hand loftily to those who were left on the walk, saying:

"Good-morning, gentlemen!—good-morning!"

So they drove in the early morning to the humble lodgings of the man who had believed that to-day was to inaugurate the grandest financial career the world had ever witnessed.

Heavy-eyed with weeping and sleeplessness, Miriam answered Ezreth Quirk's knock.

The lawyer doffed his hat and bowed with his hand on his heart.

"My dear Miss Wingate," he said, "I hope that you will rise superior to the common weaknesses of your sex. A painful duty has devolved upon me. In the absence of my client, M. de Calignay, who is now out of town, I am acting, as I know he would act."

Miriam's eyes began to distend with foreboding, and her lips fell apart, beginning to quiver.

"Madam," pursued the lawyer, "I beg that you will be calm. I assure you that there is no cause for anxiety. The case of the defendant—(Madam!) with a low bow of deprecation, "you will surely pardon me, if my life vocation obtrudes itself occasionally into my speech! I was about to say that, although your father has been unfortunate, a few days in the calm of the family circle, with the consolations which your affection will prompt, will restore him to his wonted equanimity."

"My father has failed!" gasped Miriam, paling with the consciousness of all that those few words portended.

"Let us hope that it will prove a grand success, if it cures him of—I beg your pardon!—shall I say:—his *unfortunate passion*?"

"He has failed!" repeated the girl, in a scared tone.

"Ah! Where is he?" she gasped; and then, with a quivering cry: "Oh, father!"

"I beg that you will calm yourself. There is no occasion for alarm—not the least in the world. I came before to prepare you. We will fetch him up at once—*Ah!*"

The girl heard the words "we will fetch him up," and with a sharp cry of desperation darted through the door and fled down the stairs as fast as her feet would carry her.

Seeing her father's recumbent posture in the landau, she inferred that he was dead, killed by the shock of failure, or hurried into the dread Hereafter by his own hand—the recourse of so many ruined gamblers!—and, with a shriek that startled the people whose vocations called them thus early into the street, she leaped into the carriage, clasped the loved form in her arms, and fainted away.

Windows were thrown up on both sides of the street and heads thrust forth—some night-capped, more frowzy from lack of that covering. Pedestrians stopped in their hurried walk and ran across the street; others came round the corners; until, with the surprising celerity with which crowds form in a populous city, the carriage was surrounded by an excited throng, everybody asking everybody else what was the matter, or volunteering theories derived from data which were common to all observers—a man semi-unconscious and a girl wholly so lying together in a carriage.

At last father and daughter were got up-stairs, and the crowd dispersed.

Later, Ezreth Quirk, Esq., took his departure.

He expressed regret at his inability to serve her further, business engagements, which his duty to his own family—he was a poor man, with a family large in proportion, or, perhaps, *dis-proportion*—warned him must not be neglected.

She comprehended not a word that he uttered. So now she sat alone, overwhelmed.

The morning advanced. By and by there came a knock on her door.

She rose wearily—poor thing! She was faint with hunger, though she knew it not, having eaten nothing since yesterday—closed her father's door as she passed through it, and opened the outer door.

She stood face to face with her landlord—or, more correctly, his agent—who bowed with an obsequious smile that turned her sick at heart!

The house-agent was a man of little less than the ordinary stature, with flesh enough to make him weigh in the neighborhood of two hundred pounds. Physically, he was a well-fed animal. Intellectually, he viewed everything in its relation to his five senses, and valued it in just the

degree to which it contributed to their gratification. If he had any moral sense, it never operated as a check upon his actions. His conscience was circumscribed by the statutory law.

His bullet-head, his restless little eyes, his heavy lips showed cunning, cruelty, grossness.

He put his hat under his arm while bowing, and entered the room rubbing his hands and still nodding his head at each step, the fawning smile of innate sycophancy on his face.

"Ah! Miss Miriam, good-morning!" was his salutation. "A pleasant morning we're having—a very pleasant morning. And you are looking well, my dear—remarkably well. Ah! what would we do without youth and beauty?—what indeed?"

The girl followed the door as she opened it, backing out of the way of the house-agent, so that he could enter without passing near her.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gross. Be seated, if you please," she said, faintly, motioning him to a chair at one end of the table, while she stood at the other end.

"Thank you, my child! thank you!" said Gross, sinking into the chair with a hand on either knee, and continuing to rub his knees as before he had rubbed his hands together. "Ah! I am somewhat heavy on my feet, and these stairs are long—very long—interminable! But, bless me, my dear, the sight of your charming face is like a draught of old wine—it is indeed! I always feel repaid for the effort of mounting heavenward. 'Ah! ah! that is good! Yes, yes, it is mounting heavenward indeed to come where you are. But, pardon me! Ha! ha! These compliments must seem trite—ah—'stale and unprofitable' to you, since one of your beauty—your beauty and winning graces, my dear, must be surfeited with them every day."

The girl, who was not used to Mr. Gross's peculiar style of conversation, flushed scarlet while she stood trembling with downcast eyes, waiting for him to cease speaking.

Timidly she raised her eyes from the table to his face, with a mute appeal that must have reached the most infinitesimal soul, had there been such a thing in the possession of this animal, whose business in the world was to feed himself on savory viands, to clothe his body in warm fabrics, and to repose on downy beds of ease.

"Mr. Gross," she said, in a choking voice, "I am very sorry that I cannot pay you the money that is due you to-day."

"Hum!" replied Gross.

He began to stroke his stubby beard, and the smile faded from his face.

"Let me see," he said reflectively. "It was due—ah—last week—yes, this day week."

"Yes," replied the girl, faintly.

"Hum—ah—does my memory serve me? It seems to me that you said something about some work that you could rely on."

"Yes."

"You didn't get paid as you expected, I suppose?"

"Yes, I was paid," said the girl, in a voice that could scarcely be heard.

"Then you got the money? How did it happen that you did not save it for me?"

The girl wrung her hands and writhed in an agony of embarrassment. She could not cast the blame on her father. Yet how otherwise could she explain?

"I cannot tell you," she replied; "but indeed I fully intended to pay you. And I will get work, and let you have the money as soon as possible."

The house-agent knit his brows and tapped his foot on the carpet.

"Hum! It is a week overdue, and there is no defin-ite prospect—"

"I will do the best I can. If you will trust me, I will not fail you again."

"You see, my principal is a hard man—a very hard man indeed. And I have little or no discretionary power. Only last week he compelled me to sell out a poor family. My heart bled for them. Ah! I have no idea what became of them."

The girl clenched her hands together and quivered from head to foot, gazing at the speaker with terror-distended eyes.

"I could wait on you last week," pursued Gross, "only because my report has not to be rendered until to-morrow. The account must be straight then, or I will receive instructions to proceed against you at once."

A shiver ran through the girl's frame.

"But I can't do that," continued the house-agent. "I'd rather pay the rent out of my own pocket."

"Oh! I can't have you do that!" cried Miriam, quickly.



Instinctively she shrank from placing herself under personal obligations to this man.

"There is no other way, my dear. And I have always wanted to befriend you. It is a shame that you should have to work so hard—one so young and beautiful as you. See here, I will take this burden off your shoulders. Ha! ha! You didn't look for fatherly benevolence from an old fellow like me? But, bless ye! I've got a soft corner in my heart. Eh, my pet?"

While speaking he caught her by the wrist and pulled her round to him, smiling like a death's-head.

The cry that rose to her lips she smothered by clenching her teeth resolutely. Concentrating all her energies in one desperate effort, she struck him full in the face and tore herself free, then darted across the room and seized the knob of her father's door. There she turned to gaze at her assailant, panting.

Thus far she had gone instinctively seeking her natural protector; yet she knew that he must not be disturbed, and paused before opening the door.

Gross had risen to his feet, and stood purple with chagrin. The mark of her hand burned like fire.

"Well," he said, with a sardonic grin, "you are a *striking* example of female energy and virtue. For one in your condition, I think I may say that you are *painfully* prudish. I suppose you know that the good always suffer, and appreciate the particular penalty in your own case? Need I mention that your rent is secured by your furniture, in the contract you—or, more accurately, your father signed on taking the rooms; and that I can sell you out at an hour's notice? *All because of my hard-hearted principal, you know!*" he sneered.

The indignant words that pressed for utterance at Miriam's lips were repressed. Alas! the poor cannot always afford even to resent insult!

If this man chose to put his threat into execution, what would become of her father?

"Oh! you cannot have the heart to put us out," she cried. "My father is lying here ill. He cannot be thrust into the street."

"Oh! The old gambler is in the house, is he?—and ill? Well, the hospital is the place for him."

"The hospital!" gasped the girl.

That was what she had feared. The poor dread the hospital like a prison—an unreasonable antipathy, yet difficult to eradicate.

"Yes," said Gross, brutally. "He will get better care there than he deserves. I will send the ambulance and the sheriff here together."

"Oh, I beg of you!" cried Miriam, advancing toward the house-agent with clasped hands.

With a stride he got within reach, and again grasped her wrist, interrupting her with a passionate outburst.

"I know what you would say. If he goes to the hospital, he will die a dog's death, of neglect, and be given to the doctors for dissection. Well, my haughty beauty, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that he goes there because you have spurned the kindly offices of one who would befriend you and save him—"

What more he might have said was interrupted by a knock; and without waiting for permission (which showed that the visitor felt at home) the door was opened.

Leoline, the actress, tripped into the room with a smile on her lips, which instantly faded as she paused in embarrassment and gazed from one excited face to the other.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LEOLINE DOES BATTLE.

THE coming of the actress was like a ray of hope thrown across Miriam's darkened pathway.

"Oh, Leo!" she cried, and darting past the house-agent, cast herself on her friend's breast.

Leoline put her arm protectingly about the agitated girl.

"What is the trouble, *ma chérie*?" she asked, with simulated tenderness, kissing the hair of the girl.

But Miriam could only sob and tremble. Next the actress turned a flashing eye on the house-agent.

"Well, fellow, what have you been doing to her?" she demanded.

"A very unromantic proceeding, madam, to give rise to such high tragedy," sneered Gross. "I have been petitioning for my rent, already a week overdue."

"How! and have you distressed the poor child like this for your paltry rent? Out upon you, fellow! One of her tears is worth more than your whole house!"

Gross smiled. "That sounds very nicely on the stage, madam," he said; "but it won't balance my ac-

count with my principal. At the banks they recognize nothing but hard money."

"Money! money! it is always money! Is there nothing in the world but money?"

"It is the only legal tender, I believe," said Gross, with a quiet smile.

Here Miriam found her voice.

"I have nothing to pay him, and—"

"Yes! yes! then he must wait. What is more simple?" interrupted the actress, impatiently.

"I beg to remind you that the rent is already one week overdue," objected Gross.

"Well, then, she will pay you in two. Will you not, *petite*?"

"But he will not wait—"

"My report to my principal having to be rendered to-morrow, when the account must be squared up," interposed the house-agent.

"And he threatens to sell our furniture and turn us into the street—"

"What; sell your furniture for rent?"

"According to the terms of the contract, madam, the rent is so secured. We would have no protection against dishonest people, otherwise."

"Dare you call my friends dishonest people?"

"I have not done so. But we make the contract with all alike. Then dishonest or unfortunate the result is the same to us—"

"Ah! vampires that you are! dishonest or unfortunate, you rob them of everything they have of value to swell your miser's coffers, and turn them into the street to starve, or worse! As you say, it is all the same to you—mercenary wretches!"

"And father is lying ill in the next room," sobbed Miriam. "It would kill him—"

"How! your father unwell? I had not heard of it."

"They brought him home this morning—oh! looking so strangely, I fear he will die!"

"And would you turn a sick man into the street, ghoul?" demanded the actress.

"I offered to get the ambulance and have him taken to the hospital," said Gross, doggedly.

"The ambulance!—the hospital!" cried Leoline, in dismay.

"He would get better attendance there than here."

"Ha! monster! He would be left to die of neglect by a lot of hirelings, then be given over to the butchers of doctors, to be cut to pieces and thrown on the first chance heap of offal, when he had served their purpose!"

A gasp escaped Miriam, and she clutched the actress spasmodically.

A heavy step had been mounting the stairs. It stopped before Miriam's door, and a hand not suggestive of gentleness knocked for admittance.

Miriam started from Leoline's embrace.

"It must be the provision-dealer," she said, in new distress.

The actress went to the door to meet the new foe, if he came in that guise. Her frown relaxed as she discovered nothing more formidable than a grocer's man, with a sack of flour on his shoulder and a basket of other provisions at his feet.

"I've brung the bill, ma'am," he said, pulling off his hat as he would pull a sack of flour off from a pile, and thrusting a piece of paper abruptly at Miriam, without looking up.

The girl looked at the paper, wringing her hands in distress, and then gazed in mute appeal at the actress.

"What is this?" asked Leoline, taking the paper from the man's hand with something approaching an unladylike jerk.

"It's the bill for the goods, ma'am, and the balance from last month."

"Well, Miss Wingate has not the change at hand. She will pay it at the end of the week."

"The boss said it was promised sure fur to-day."

"Tell your master that there is nothing sure but death and stupidity. At any rate, we have no money for him to-day."

"Then I'm to take the goods back, and the boss'll come and settle the rest himself!" throwing the emphasis of sulky menace into the last clause.

"Take the things back!"

"That's the orders."

"And what will these people eat?"

"That's none o' the boss's business. He reckons he won't let 'em live off o' him no longer."

"Ah! the brute! Does he think that he will not be paid?"

"It looks like it, unless he helps himself."

"Silence, you knave!" cried the actress.

"Dare you insult those to whom you are as filth under foot! Go and tell your master to help himself as he can!"

"Leo! Leo!" expostulated Miriam.

But the actress thoroughly aroused, thrust the bill into the man's hand, continuing:

"Take yourself and your garbage out of the house, instantly!"

The man received the bill and put his hat on, much as he would draw on a hood.

"See here, ma'am!—I reckon you'd better settle with me. The boss is a scorch when he gets waked up," he said, pausing with his hand on the handle of the basket.

"That's for your master!" cried Leoline, snapping her fingers in the man's face. "Leave the house, I say!"

And she pushed the basket toward him, as if he could not move quickly enough for her impatience.

"All right!—all right!" was the menacing response; and swinging the sack of flour to his shoulder and taking the basket from the table, the grocer's man marched out of the room.

In disgust Leoline slammed the door to.

Gross, the house-agent, had resumed his seat, where he had become a silent spectator of a scene for which he had the relish of an epicure in cruelty. His little pig-like eyes twinkled and he rubbed his knees with evident satisfaction. The man—let us say the animal was in his element!

Evidently the grocer, doubtful as to the issue of the negotiation, had accompanied his subordinate, to be at hand if the money was not forthcoming as agreed.

When a moment later he appeared on the scene, he crossed the threshold with a stride meant to impress every one with his importance, but which from its affectedness was exceedingly ludicrous, since he was built to take about two steps to a woman's one.

After one glance of defiance at Leoline, he ignored her, and turned to the house-agent.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, with affected business-like directness. "You are a perfect stranger to me; but I wish a witness to a transaction which is imminent. My name is Hogg, sir—John Hogg, of Hogg & Bacon, general grocers and provision dealers."

Gross bowed without speaking, and Mr. Hogg turned to Miriam.

"You see that I am prepared, madam, for any emergency. I understand the law, madam, and I am *always* prepared!"

"We have already told that fellow to go packing with his truck," cried Leoline. "Why do you continue to worry this poor child with your rignarole about the law?"

For at Mr. Hogg's legal parade Miriam had turned faint with fear, so that Leoline had put her arm about her.

In return for her interference Mr. Hogg favored the actress with a grand salaam of mock deference, flourishing his silk hat with an imposing wave.

"I beg your pardon, madam!" he said. "I do not recognize in you a party to this transaction."

"Madam," turning to Miriam, "I beg leave to present my bill for groceries and provisions had during the current month to date, with balance due from last month."

And with formal solemnity he again tendered the paper which a moment before Leoline had treated with such contempt.

"I cannot pay you," said Miriam. "I have not the money."

"Witness all," cried Hogg, waving his hat in one hand and the bill in the other; "she has denied payment, the bill being legally proffered for payment!"

"And no doubt it has afforded you great satisfaction!" said Leoline, spitefully. "It is the first time I ever saw radishes tied with red tape. Now will you be off?"

"One moment, madam, and perhaps I will give you a better subject for your wit," said Hogg, with dignity. "Observe that the debt is covered by a promissory note, secured by your sewing-machine!"

"How!" cried Leoline. "You are a famous jester. I yield you the palm for wit, if you will tell me what meat and potatoes have to do with sewing-machines."

"A chattel mortgage supplies the link, my dear madam!" said Hogg, triumphantly.

"I had to do it, Leo, to secure continued credit," explained Miriam. "It was our only resource, and I felt sure of the money to-day."

"And were you not paid?" asked Leoline.

"Yes, I was paid," admitted Miriam.

"And where is the money, dear?"

"Where, indeed?" asked Hogg.

Again was the gambler's daughter brought face to face with her father's act; but she was incapable of betraying him.

"Do not ask me—I cannot tell you," she said.



covering her face with her hands; for she could not bear the questioning look centered upon her from three pairs of eyes.

"Mystery!" ejaculated Hogg, in a tone that was an insult.

Leoline whirled upon him like a flash.

"It is no business of yours, dolt!" she cried. "Enough—she has not the money."

"There is but one course open to me, then. I will proceed at once to recover my money by due process of law. Ladies—and you, sir—permit me to bid you a very good-morning!"

"One moment!" interposed Gross.

"Sir, I am at your service," said Hogg.

"I may as well save you trouble by saying that I hold a claim prior to your own covering all the furniture as security for rent."

"I thank you, sir, for your good will," replied Hogg; "but your claim cannot possibly conflict with mine. The lady is of age and a spinster. The sewing-machine is her personal property. All my dealings have been with her personally, and whether the goods were for her benefit in whole or only in part, she has assumed the debt and given the mortgage over her own signature. Any bond that the father may have placed on his furniture cannot affect the personal property of the daughter, who, being of age, stands to him legally in the relation of housekeeper, only."

Gross replied:

"You have fallen into a very natural error. Although the whole business of the house is conducted by the young lady, and everything in it is hers in her own view, and doubtless in that of her father, since all has been bought with money earned by her, and though this responsibility has given her an air of maturity much beyond her years, yet the fact is that she is not legally of age. If she has told you differently, it was doubtless from her imperfect information, as many persons confound that coming of age which enables a woman to marry without the consent of her parents with that majority which renders her competent to hold and transfer property."

"Great Heaven!" screamed Hogg, in his very unmanly treble, "I have been swindled, cheated, humbugged! Madam, do you know what you have done? You have committed a monstrous, an iniquitous fraud! You have got goods under false pretenses! You have given me security which is no security! And now do you know what I will do with you? I will have you in prison before you are an hour older!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### LEOLINE'S RECOURSE.

FORGETFUL of the length of stride befitting his manly character, in his excitement Hogg had trotted back and forth with the mincing steps for which nature had adapted him. He stopped and bravely shook his fist in Miriam's face as he hurled his threat of imprisonment at her.

If there was any clap-trap in Mr. Hogg's exposition of the law, the women were too ill-informed to detect it. The bewildered and frightened Miriam saw herself unwittingly guilty of a crime for which she was amenable to the law. She to prison and her father to the hospital! What would become of them?

With this picture before her mind she dropped on her knees in an agony of terror, and hid her face in the skirt of Leoline's dress.

"Ah, you monsters!" cried the actress, putting her arms protectingly about her friend, "must this poor child go to prison between you? What is this enormous debt for a month's rent and a handful of provisions?"

"The sum due me is ten dollars," said Gross.

"My bill is seven dollars and forty-five cents," said Hogg.

"What! A paltry seventeen dollars and forty-five cents! A home broken up, the father sent to the hospital, and the child—a tender girl!—to prison, for seventeen dollars and forty-five cents!"

"For the fraud, madam—"

"Bah! you blood-sucker!—you slaughterer of innocents!—you toy man!—you microscopic persecutor of women!—I will make myself responsible for this debt; and for yours, too"—turning to Gross. "Look to me for payment, and release my friends, you devil-fish!"

With his physical manhood thus assailed, Hogg choked with fury. He could only stamp his feet and clench his hands.

Gross was amused, though he did not let the manikin see him smile. To Leoline he said:

"Madam, if you have the money to pay the rent, that is all that is required."

"I have not the money at hand; but am I not

good for seventeen dollars and forty-five cents? Do you know me?"

"I have been charmed by your acting, madam, and have no doubt of your responsibility for a much greater amount," said Gross, bowing deferentially; but—

"But!" interrupted Leoline, hotly, "I see that you want security! I have no furniture, like this poor child; but I will give you an order on my manager, which he will accept. Then, if he does not pay you at the end of the week when my salary falls due, you can sell out his theater for your seventeen dollars and forty-five cents!"

Now Hogg found his voice. Standing before the actress with clenched hands, and glaring up into her face—she was taller than he—as if about to fly at her, he screamed:

"And do you think I would accept you and your manager as security for my debt!—you theater woman!—you wearer of tights and paint!—you immodest dancer in short dresses!"

The whole proceeding was so ridiculous that, instead of resenting Mr. Hogg's ungallant speech, Leoline burst into a laugh, which drove the little man almost frantic. But the seriousness of the occasion quickly recalled her.

"Madam," said Gross, "I am sorry that I cannot accept your offer so generously made; but I must have the money to-day, before the close of banking hours, or I shall be compelled to proceed at once."

"Oh! my poor child, what can I do for you?" sighed Leoline, bending over Miriam and letting a tear fall upon her cheek. "If M. de Calignay were only in the city, he would succor you; but I am helpless!"

"Oh, Leo!" sobbed the girl, clinging to her friend, "do not distress yourself for us. You can do nothing. I will never forget your kindness—never!"

"Hah!" cried the actress, suddenly starting up. "What a simpleton I have been! Ha! ha! ha! I have it! Now, you vampires, I shall defeat you! See!"

And drawing herself erect, flushed with exultation, she stripped the ornaments from fingers, wrists and throat, and even removed the rings from her ears.

"Take them, Shylock!" she cried, huddling them all together and forcing them into Gross's hand. "Put them in pledge at the nearest pawn-shop—some friend of yours, no doubt!—and return with the money. You shall have your pound of flesh—you, too! Go! go!"

"Madam, there is more than enough here," said Gross.

"Hah! you mole!" cried the actress, "cannot you see beyond your paltry debt?" We must have food here, and a doctor for the man you would send to the hospital. Go, as I bid you! And here!—oblige me by sending this note by messenger, at once."

The note was to our friend Sammy, requesting his immediate attendance.

Gross bowed and withdrew; and Leoline took Miriam in her arms and endeavored to comfort her.

The gratitude of the gambler's daughter knew no bounds. The only expression she could give it was to cling to her friend and sob.

In due time Gross returned with money and pawn tickets.

"Here, Mr. Hogg!" said Leoline, with an emphasis on his name the significance of which could not be mistaken, as she tendered him the money due him, "oblige me with the mortgage you extorted from this poor child. Thank you. Now, good-afternoon!"

"Madam," said Hogg, deferentially, "you spoke of requiring provisions—"

"Good-afternoon!"

"Those which I have bought—"

"Will you go, or shall I drive you out with the broomstick?"

And Leoline seized a broom as if about to make her threat good.

"Witness all!" cried Hogg, beginning to retreat, "if she dares to strike me, I will have her arrested for assault and battery!"

"Bah!" cried the actress, tossing the broom back into the corner, "this is the way to manage boys!"

And seizing Mr. Hogg by the shoulders, she whirled him round and marched him out of the room, he crying:

"Bear witness, sir! It needs but the weight of the hand to constitute a case of assault!"

The door was closed on the little man, and he was heard learnedly discoursing on the law as he descended the stairs.

"And here, Judas, are your shekels. Let us not see you again for a month," said Leoline, giving the house-agent his due.

Gross bowed low as he received the money, placing his hand on his heart.

"Madam," he said, "if all my tenants combined your beauty with your business qualities, my life would be a happy one—a very happy one!"

"Miss Wingate, allow me to congratulate you on the possession of so charming a friend—a friend so helpful that you will not need my—"

"Enough, hypocrite! We are done with you," interrupted Leoline, while Miriam shuddered.

Mr. Gross retreated from the room, bowing repeatedly; and smiling and rubbing his hands.

"Now, dear," said Leoline, turning to Miriam, "we are well rid of the wretches. Let us go at once to your father, the good gentleman who has a smile and a kind word for every one."

"Oh! my dear friend—my more than friend!" cried Miriam, "how can I repay you for all—"

"Hush! Not a word!"

And she drew her to the room where the gambler lay.

There was a look of pained perplexity on his face. His eyes were fixed on vacancy, and he paid no heed to their entrance into the room.

In tears Miriam knelt by the bedside and took his hand.

"Oh! why does he act so strangely?" she asked.

Leoline put her hand on his forehead and spoke to him.

He looked at her vacantly, and made no reply.

Soon Sammy made his appearance. The youth evinced deep sympathy, but was hurried off for food and a doctor.

He had been gone scarcely five minutes when some one was heard ascending the stairs two at a time.

"The doctor. He is prompt," said Leoline, and passed into the outer room to admit him.

Miriam heard the door opened, heard the actress utter a cry, and then:

"Ah! my dear uncle!—at last—how we have needed you!"

Going to the door of her father's room, Miriam saw M. de Calignay just crossing the threshold of her home. There was a look of deep anxiety on his face. He carried a sachel and duster, as if just from travel.

## CHAPTER X.

### EZRETH QUIRK, ESQ., AT HOME.

AND now let us admit the patient reader behind the scenes.

M. de Calignay's alleged absence from the city was a fraud, as was almost everything else that he was concerned in.

The news of the Curate's remarkable success and ultimate failure reached him within an hour of the event. With all dispatch he repaired to No. 7, Court House Place. It was an alley, so narrow that the outstretched hands could touch the walls on either side, the entrance to which was an arched passage beneath the buildings that formed a continuous front on the principal street. There were sample-rooms and eating-houses for business-men below, and offices in the upper stories.

Ascending the flights of dark stairs, lighting his way by striking matches, M. de Calignay came to room 49.

Beside the door was a box filled with ashes and the sweepings of the room, not a little of which had been spilled and left to litter the floor. On the ashes stood an old tin pail containing table refuse—potato-parings and the like. Just before the door was a dilapidated mat, so foul that a fastidious person would incline to step clear of it rather than to wipe his feet on it.

On the door was nailed a square of battered tin, the paint and japan being cracked off in places. What was left of the inscription read:

"EZRETH QUIRK, ESQ."

"Atorney & Counselor at Law."

On this door M. de Calignay knocked with more vigor than ceremony, startling the echoes in the dark, cobwebby hall.

A long-drawn snore came like a reply from the room, as if the sleeper protested against the interruption.

"Cochon!" (hog) muttered the Frenchman, impatiently, and struck the panel three sounding blows that would have awakened the Seven Sleepers.

A whining cry, as of a child partially aroused from sleep, was audible, then a woman's voice, guarded to a hoarse whisper, calling:

"Quirk! Quirk!"

A grunt of expostulation responded, followed by the sound of some one turning over in bed.



A child's voice was raised in indistinct interrogation, and another set up a piping wail.

The woman commanded: "*Hush!*" in a manner that quieted the juveniles, and then persisted:

"Quirk! There's somebody at the door!"

"Eh! What's the matter?" asked a man's voice.

M. de Calignay himself answered by thundering a third summons.

A man leaped out of bed and crossed the floor with bare feet.

"Who's there?" he demanded, before unfastening the door.

"M. de Calignay!" replied the Frenchman, in an imperious tone. "Come! I have no patience with sluggards!"

"Ah! M. de Calignay, my esteemed client! I beg your pardon, sir!—I humbly beg your pardon! One moment, sir, if you please! I am sorry to keep you waiting—indeed, sir, I am very sorry!"

Then lowering his voice to a whisper, the lawyer continued:

"Strike a light, Mariar! Hurry! hurry! we can't afford to keep gentlemen of means waiting!"

Mrs. Quirk hastened to light a tallow dip, whose feeble rays discovered Ezreth Quirk, Esq., struggling into his pantaloons, his soiled linen no longer hidden by the coat with the ink-stained sleeve—discovered Mrs. Quirk in a very slatternly night-dress and a cap with one string, from which her hair hung neglected—discovered four shock-headed children, the oldest not over ten or twelve years of age, sitting bolt-upright in a trundle-bed, digging their knuckles into their eyes and staring questioningly at their parents, a fifth, an infant in arms, lying asleep in the bed from which the elders had risen—discovered a table in the middle of the floor covered with dirty dishes and the remains of last evening's supper, while pots and pans yawned in unsightly uncleanness on the hearth.

As Ezreth Quirk, Esq., ran his eye over his disordered household, a frown gathered on his brow.

"Mariar!" he exclaimed, very guardedly, however, "how often have I told you not to leave such an infernal litter about? This room looks more like a pig-sty than like a lawyer's office!"

"Ezreth Quirk!" retorted his spouse, assuming a very belligerent tone and manner, and speaking not so cautiously as her husband had, for she was "*mad*," "if you expect me to board you and a hull regiment o' your young-ones in one room, and keep it lookin' like the Crystal Palace, perhaps you'll live to find out that that's jest where you're mistook!"

"For God's sake! lower your voice, Mariar!" petitioned Ezreth Quirk, Esq., capitulating at discretion. "And hurry these things out of sight."

Satisfied with her victory, Mrs. Quirk hustled all of her children into the large bed, beneath which the trundle-bed was pushed. The supper table with its litter of crockery and cold victuals was then lifted bodily and placed between the untidy hearth and the foot of the bed, after which a green curtain was drawn, cutting off that end of the room.

Mrs. Quirk got into the bed with her children, where they became as still as mice, and, lo! Ezreth Quirk, Esq.'s home was metamorphosed into Ezreth Quirk, Esq.'s law office! If the few dog-eared, rack-backed books that cumbered his dusty desk had been disposed to tell the secret, they would have lacked opportunity, since no one ever consulted them.

"My honored client," said the lawyer, opening the door after the expiration of not more than two minutes from the time the transformation began, "pardon me, I beg, the unavoidable detention—"

"Save ze rest for ze time of more leisure," said M. de Calignay, entering the room impatiently, but declining the chair Mr. Quirk hastened to set for him, first having dusted it with the skirt of his coat. "I wish your service at once. Ze Curate has just come within one of breaking Jerry Camp's bank; but ze last turn of ze card has made him a pauper. He is lying unconscious. Nobody knows him, more zan zat he is ze Curate. You must go and take him home. Camp will furnish ze carriage, no doubt—he cannot do less."

"Tell Miss Wingate zat you hear of her father's misfortune by accident, and I being away from ze city, you act for me. You are a poor man—alas! you cannot help her more! Do you comprehend?"

Ezreth Quirk, Esq., already knew the relations subsisting between M. de Calignay and the Curate. With this cue he readily grasped the

Frenchman's plan. He knew that there was some rascality afoot, but, far from troubling him, that was most to his taste.

With a celerity which was the result of years of practice in chicane, he formed and detailed circumstantially his plan of operations.

"Good!" said M. de Calignay. "If you always serve me so well, ze day will come when I will outweigh for you your trick-books over zere with gold. See! it will be ze color and quality of zis!"

And contemptuously he tossed a specimen gold piece to the man whom he had said he held as a dog at his bidding.

Ezreth Quirk, Esq., caught the gold piece much as a dog catches a piece of meat thrown to him, and smiled not unlike the fawning of a dog after the meat had disappeared in his maw, as he slipped the money into his pocket and said:

"My most generous client—as I serve you, so may—"

"Good-morning!" interrupted M. de Calignay, and stepped out of the room and closed the door in the sycophant's face in a manner which showed how utterly he despised him.

"Well, Mariar," said Mr. Quirk, turning as his wife issued from behind the curtain, "how does that sound! He will 'outweigh my trick-books with gold!' For a Frenchman, he speaks very good English—excellent English—eh, Mariar?—English that we like to hear!"

"I don't like his high-and-mighty airs much," said Mrs. Quirk, ungraciously.

"Bah! what do we care about the air—hal! hal! a pun, Mariar—yes, yes, what do we care about the air when it rains such fellows as this? See it!"—flipping the coin into the air. "Hear it!"—clinking it on his desk. "And, Mariar, it's only the first drop in the shower!"

"And we'll be lucky if it ain't the last!" grumbled Mrs. Quirk. "Give it to me."

Four little Quirks had followed their mother out from behind the curtain, to gather about their father's desk and watch with round eyes the wonderful little bit of shining metal fly up into the air and drop back into his palm, and hear it jingle as he dropped it upon his desk.

When their mother seized upon the prize they followed her hand wonderingly with their eyes, and then looked up into her face with a breaking smile, as if of congratulation.

Thereupon Ezreth Quirk, Esq., tumbled them one after the other on the floor, and as they scrambled to their feet again and scampered off to bed laughing at the top of their voices, he followed them on all fours, crying:

"Boo! boo! boo!"

Reader, the most unsightly oyster may conceal a tiny pearl hidden away somewhere. I have given you a glimpse of the one pearl in Ezreth Quirk's very unhandsome shell of rascality and general worthlessness.

You have seen how he performed his mission. Let us now follow M. de Calignay in his intrigue.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A "QUEER" NEGOTIATION.

CONFIDENT of Ezreth Quirk's ability to carry out the scheme he had intrusted to him, M. de Calignay troubled himself no further in the matter, but went to his hotel to get a few hours' sleep, leaving orders when he was to be awakened.

His plans were matured, so that they did not keep him from sleep. He was of that constitution of mind which can leave the possibilities of failure to the future which holds them, every measure having been adopted to insure success.

As for his conscience, that never troubled him.

At nine o'clock, refreshed and with faultless toilet, he presented himself at the office of Mr. Gross, the house-agent.

"Ah, sir! Good-morning, sir! I am pleased to see you. Pray be seated, sir!" was that gentleman's greeting, as he rose rubbing his hands cordially, to open the gate of the railing which surrounded his private desk, and place a chair—a hospitable-looking arm-chair for his rather distinguished-looking patron.

M. de Calignay sat on the edge of the chair and held his silk hat in his hand, resting a hand on either knee, after the manner of a man whose business is brief and time limited.

"I have ze honor to salute Monsieur Gross—note?" he asked, taking the measure of the house-agent with his eye.

"Gross—yes, sir—Ebenezer Gross. May I know whom I have the honor to serve?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Names are but empty air!"

"True! true, sir! Hal! hal! very empty, in-

deed—as we sometimes learn to our sorrow—when unsecured! But I beg your pardon, sir!—I beg your pardon! Pray proceed."

"You have a tenant—Monsieur Arthur Wingate?"

"Generally called 'The Curate.' Yes, sir."

"Ah! ze Curate. Yes, ze same."

"Perhaps it would be more accurate to say his daughter, since all of our dealings are with her. That is to say, she finds the money."

"Um! Is she prompt of payment?"

"As a rule, yes."

"Ah! 'as a rule.' But ze last payment? It is overdue—it is note yet made?"

"I beg your pardon!" said Gross, hesitating and eying his rather unusual patron.

"I grant you my pardon!" said M. de Calignay, sarcastically, putting his hand into his pocket, then leaning forward and putting something into Mr. Gross's palm.

The house-agent glanced down at what he had received, closed his fingers on it, coughed mechanically behind his other hand, glanced at the man who sat opposite him, and concluded by bowing and saying:

"Thank you, sir. I see, sir, that you are a business-man—a thorough-going business man, sir. I think we will have no further difficulty. Any information that I can give you, sir—any assistance that I can render—"

"Ye-es!" interrupted M. de Calignay, with his wonted cynical sneer, "we reduce ze friction in machinery by employing brass bearings. With men gold subserves ze same end."

"Hal! hal! ha!" laughed Gross, mechanically.

"A good joke—a very good joke, sir!"

M. de Calignay did not smile.

"I feel a deep interest in ze Curate, and in his beautiful daughter," he pursued. "I am a friend of ze family. It is my wish to serve zem."

"Exactly!" said Gross, understanding him perfectly from his manner. "You were asking about the last month's rent."

"Has it been paid?"

"No."

"Ah! it is to be regretted."

"But it will be paid to-day."

"You are sure?"

"Miss Wingate has promised."

"But ze best intentions sometimes fail."

"She showed me work the payment on which was sure, as soon as completed."

"My good sir, she has no money to-day."

"What!"

"She has note a sou!"

"But the work was finished?"

"True."

"And paid for?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then how is she without money?"

"Alas! her father!"

"What has he to do with it?"

"He loves her."

"Yes. Well?"

"And he is a gambler!"

"And has taken her money?"

"Voila ze passion damnable, zat shall blind affection!"

"But I must be paid!"

"True; but what certainty zat ze child—alas! zat such grievous burden should fall on her frail shoulder!—what certainty zat she will ever have ze money, when he may descend at any time upon her small hoard? I, her friend, ask you."

"And you have come to pay for her?" asked Gross, beginning to feel uncertain as to his first impression.

But M. de Calignay was not long in giving it ample confirmation.

"I!" he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders and spreading his fingers in dismay. "Where shall I get money?"

And once more he put his hand into his pocket, and placed something in Mr. Gross's palm.

The house-agent looked at the coin and then at the man, who sat opposite him with a face which had hardened into lines of contempt for the tool he was buying and merciless tenacity of the end for which he was buying him—looked and hitched his chair into more confidential vicinity with the instinct of a conspirator.

"Well?" he asked, lowering his voice.

But M. de Calignay waved him off and pushed his own chair as far back as Mr. Gross had advanced. The action said as plainly as words could have done:

"Let us keep our distance. I buy you—I do not affiliate with you!"

Mr. Gross, albeit not an overly thin-skinned individual in business matters, flushed scarlet.

M. de Calignay applied a golden salve to his wounded dignity, and the house-agent smiled again.



"Monsieur cannot wait longer for his rent?—no?"

"No."

"Obligations to meet, or something?"

"Let us say that I must report to my principal to-morrow."

"A hard man who will note wait?"

"Just so."

"Still, if she has note ze money?"

"The rent is secured by the furniture."

"Ah! a cutthroat lease!"

"Tenants sometimes call it that."

"And you will sell her furniture and turn her homeless into ze street? Helas! ze misfortune of poverty!"

"It is my only recourse. My principal is a hard man, like too many of the wealthy."

"But her father is ill. What will become of him? Alas! ze hospital?"

"He will certainly get better care there than she can give him, without money."

"But ze poor die of neglect in ze hospitals, and ze doctor receive ze body. If it is suggested to her, she will be horrified. Ah! my good sir, do note tell her of zis, if she does note already know it!"

And M. de Calignay was so much affected that he dropped another coin into Gross's hand.

"But, monsieur," pursued the Frenchman, "cannot zis all be avoided? You are gallant. You have admired her beauty. You have longed to befriend her and lift ze grievous burden of care from her shoulder. Out of your generous heart you can offer to pay her rent, and add dresses and jewels and all zat pleases ze heart of youth and beauty."

The Frenchman paused, leaned forward, and tapped Gross on the knee, nodding his head repeatedly and saying, slowly:

"Monsieur is a man of ze world!"

Gross shook his head.

"That won't work," he said, decidedly. "If I know anything about women, Miss Wingate is not—"

"Tiens!" interrupted the Frenchman. "Can she prevent monsieur from making ze offer?"

"But it would be insulting her to no purpose."

"To no purpose?"

And another coin found its way into Mr. Gross's possession.

"Monsieur," continued M. de Calignay, rising from his chair, "I have a lady friend who may be willing to pay Miss Wingate's rent. If she offers it *in money*, of course you will accept. But necessity requires you to insist on money. I am sorry zat I have note succeeded in inducing you to give my friends more time. Good-morning!"

While viewing M. de Calignay's back, Mr. Gross's mental comment was:

"He's the devil—but he pays!"

Having given the foregoing as a specimen of M. de Calignay's mode of operations, we will pass over his interview with Leoline and Hogg, of Hogg & Bacon, saying only that the former was of course wholly in his confidence, while he merely stimulated the fears of the latter by hinting that perhaps he had better press his claim, trusting to his cupidity for the rest.

Everything had worked perfectly, and now he stood on the threshold of Miriam's home in the guise of a traveler just returned.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DR. MEREDITH'S TRIUMPH.

It will be remembered that Leoline admitted M. de Calignay. At sight of her he muttered, interrogatively:

"Est-il bien?"—(Is it all right?)

To which she answered, in the same guarded tone:

"Bien!"

Then, for Miriam's benefit, she uttered a cry of surprise, exclaiming:

"Ah! my dear uncle!—at last!—how we have needed you!"

"Alas! am I too late?" asked M. de Calignay; and hurriedly putting his sachel, duster and hat into Leoline's hands, he passed on to meet Miriam, who was approaching from the door of her father's room.

"Ah! my poor child, what affliction has fallen upon us all—and I away!" he cried, with artistically simulated grief and self-reproach.

The girl could only cling to his hands, her tears falling silently. Hers was a nature deeply touched by kindness. Her gratitude to him for his friendly sympathy with her and her father was beyond expression.

"Lead me to him at once," he said, and together they entered the chamber.

The gambler lay in the same dull stupor. The

expression of his face had not changed. He had not moved a muscle.

"Ah! my dear friend!" cried M. de Calignay, clasping the Curate's hand in both of his, and gazing into his face, "will you ever forgive me for my absence when your need was greatest?"

The hand was unresponsive. The Curate looked at M. de Calignay, but made no reply.

"Grace de dieu!" cried the Frenchman, "he is paralyzed!"

There was genuine feeling this time, as he started back, pale to the lips. If the Curate remained a paralytic, or died before M. de Calignay's plans were perfected, the courts would have too much to do with the management of his prospective estate for the schemer to reap much benefit from it.

The words of the Frenchman thrilled Miriam to the heart. To her, paralysis was almost as terrible as death.

She made no outcry. Only a spasmodic gasp, as she placed her hand over her heart, showed how greatly she was shocked. Then she stood gazing at the immobile face with its frozen expression, her eyes distended and a cold moisture about her lips.

"Ah! my stricken dear!" cried Leoline, clasping Miriam with her arm; but the girl did not heed her now.

"A physician!—a physician!" cried M. de Calignay, excitedly.

"One has been sent for," replied Leoline.

"Ah! that may be his step!"

And she ran to the door and opened it just as a gentleman was about to knock.

"Are you the doctor?" she asked, looking past him into the hall for Sammy, who, however, was not in his company, but a strange youth, instead.

"I am Dr. Meredith, sent here by Mr. Jerry Camp—"

"Pray enter at once!" cried M. de Calignay, interrupting his explanation.

The doctor immediately approached his patient. The boy accompanying him entered with a box under his arm, which proved to be an electric battery.

The doctor was young, not more than twenty-six, or thereabouts, of medium stature, wearing a full beard, and with that pallor, sparseness of flesh and slight knitting of the brows which often marks the thoughtful student. His broad, high forehead and clear eye sufficiently indicated his mental endowment. He was a man of deep feeling and unswerving fortitude—one who would prove himself a hero, if circumstances gave him the opportunity. He loved man rather than men, and had chosen the profession in which he could relieve most human suffering.

His calm intellectuality immediately enlisted Miriam's confidence.

"Oh! you will save him?" she murmured, gazing up into his face as if he were the sole arbiter of her parent's fate.

"We can never be fully assured of the issue," said the doctor; "but you will know in a few minutes. I can only say—hope!"

She could not have told why, but with his words the wild beating of her heart ceased, and a great peace stole over her.

Once while she was helping him his hand rested upon hers for a little time. In the midst of her great anxiety she was vividly conscious of his touch; and yet, though he was a perfect stranger to her, the consciousness did not bring with it a desire to remove her hand. She felt a sense of security in this nearness to him. A close observer might have seen that a faint color came into her pale cheeks and remained there as long as the hands were in contact, to fade away again when they were separated.

The less sensitive organism of the man gave no indication that he was affected in any degree. His mind was wholly engrossed in his work.

While his preparations were still in progress, Sammy returned with a physician for whom he had gone.

The new arrival was a man with a bald head and a long, flowing, white beard, in marked contrast with Dr. Meredith's youthful appearance. He had a trick of stroking his beard with his hand, which gave him a very patriarchal air. He was evidently one who talked little. Most people would have argued that he must therefore think much, and in consequence be very wise.

Dr. Meredith greeted him courteously and welcomed his assistance if he saw fit to give it. The other was distantly polite, listened to what Dr. Meredith had to say, and then enunciated his dictum.

"My dear sir," he said, with an air of lofty patronage, "I recognize the fact that you are first in the field, and that professional courtesy

would restrain me from presuming to interfere with your method of treatment. Moreover, young men seldom take kindly to suggestions from their elders in years and experience. But, sir, since you have in a measure consulted me, I feel bound to say, in the interest of humanity, that in my humble opinion you are altogether wrong—altogether wrong! This is not a case for electric treatment. I will not answer for the consequences if you persist."

Dr. Meredith looked chagrined as well as surprised, but retained perfect self-possession. Turning to the friends of the patient, he said, quietly:

"Before so decided an opinion from one so much my senior I am willing to waive the privilege of precedence and leave you to decide between us. I can only add that while this may be followed by the happiest results or prove an utter failure, I am still confident that it offers the greatest hope of restoration."

In a case where he could apply his own knowledge M. de Calignay would not have hesitated a moment. As it was, he had that contempt for medical skill not infrequently found among those who have never had a pain or an ache.

"Bah! these doctors!" he reflected. "It is hit and miss with them. No two counsel alike. If the patient is strong, he lives in spite of them!"

This held him undecided.

But with a self-assertion that was peculiar to her in great emergencies, Miriam spoke at once.

"I elect that Dr. Meredith proceed. I fear delay more than anything else."

Unconsciously she moved to the young doctor's side, facing the others as if to repel their antagonism to him.

The elder man bowed low, with a smile which said:

"Madam, my wisdom yields to your favorite's good looks!"

Dr. Meredith quickly completed his preparations and applied the electricity.

The patient shivered from head to foot, and instantly burst into speech.

"Lost!—lost!—all lost! Oh! Miriam, my darling, I have ruined you!—you for whom I risked all!"

And covering his head with the bedclothes he groaned and sobbed in agony of spirit.

The elder doctor stroked his beard and smiled, as who would say:

"Some people are born to fool's luck!"

Dr. Meredith turned, flushed with triumph.

He saw Miriam attempt to speak, then press her hand over her heart while every vestige of color faded from her face.

He caught her in his arms as she swayed a moment before falling. She lay limp and unconscious, her head resting on his shoulder.

He had never before been so impressed with her pure, classic beauty. Now, with her eyes closed and her face colorless, she looked like a piece of statuary.

But she thrilled him as no statue could have done. She had the magnetism of a living woman; and for the first time his soul was stirred with an emotion that was destined to vibrate on and on through all the eternities!

He did not know it then. He only felt a solicitude for her which he had never experienced for any of the hundreds that had come under his care. Ordinarily he would have felt no anxiety over a mere fainting-fit. Now he was as much agitated as if the life of one near and dear to him were at stake.

From one thought he derived some comfort. He believed that privation, anxiety and loss of sleep, and not constitutional weakness, disposed her to these lapses of consciousness.

After bearing her into the next room and laying her on the settle, perhaps he let his arms remain about her a moment longer than was necessary; for he was aroused by the touch of M. de Calignay's hand on his shoulder and the words:

"Doctor, permit me to offer you ze glass of water."

Something in the cold tones and manner of the Frenchman caused the young physician to flush with embarrassment. It broke the spell with which Miriam had held him.

But the mischief was done beyond his retreat or M. de Calignay's prevention. He could command his outward action, but he could not quiet a secret feverish unrest.

"If monsieur ze doctor will attend his patient, myself and Mlle. Leoline will relieve him of ze care of Miss Wingate," said M. de Calignay; and, thanking him, the doctor returned to the Curate.

When he came to go, Leoline engaged Miriam while M. de Calignay bowed him out. He made no attempt to see the girl, but hours after-



ward, in his office, her pale, beautiful face haunted him so persistently that he rose and paced the floor in impatience.

"A gambler's daughter!—the associate of actresses and ballet-dancers—a ballet-dancer herself, perhaps!" he muttered, frowning.

But the face stood out in all its purity, and the calm gray eyes looked at him reproachfully, silencing him.

Meanwhile, Leoline and her reputed uncle, M. de Calignay, had taken their leave, rehearsal furnishing the actress's excuse, and left Miriam with Sammy for company.

The gambler's daughter had clung to her false friends, overflowing with gratitude, and they had acted their part so well that they stood first of all the world to her, next to her father. M. de Calignay had drawn her head downward upon his breast and kissed her forehead, and she had not shown any antipathy.

But once in the actress's own room, the mask dropped.

"Ah! how I hate her!" she cried, pacing the floor with clenched hands and set teeth. "I have kissed her when I would that every kiss were a draught of poison! I have protested love for her when I would that every word were a poniard to stab her to the heart!"

"Patience! patience!" expostulated M. de Calignay. "You shall have your revenge, and both of us will be compensated. I have a scheme. Our good friend will not live much longer. Ah! it will be worth a million to be Mlle. Miriam's best friend! Wait! wait!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE DENUNCIATION.

THE Curate's recovery was rapid, and, though prohibited by the doctor, he returned at once to his old life. When expostulated with by his daughter, he said:

"It was a fatal mistake. I should have known better. Thirteen is the most unlucky number. I was warned again and again; but I thought that it was for the bank. But the next time, my darling, I shall not fail! Miriam, dearest, you shall yet roll in untold wealth!"

She sighed. It was hopeless.

Meanwhile, she felt that she owed her father's life and her own home to her friends. M. de Calignay was her uncle, Leoline was her sister, and Sammy (her only friend in truth!) her brother.

Of Dr. Meredith she had seen little, of James Bowie nothing since the day he came to her rescue in the picnic grounds. Of the latter she often thought with admiration, blended with regret at her enforced incivility. The former came and went in her thoughts, awakening gratitude as the preserver of her father so vivid as to exclude or overshadow any other emotion.

Thus matters stood when the crisis, all unannounced, burst like a bolt from a clear sky.

The Curate again had recourse to James Bowie, intending, as shown in the opening of our story, to use Leoline, not unwilling, as a "stool-pigeon." But now Bowie showed a strange reluctance to visit the actress.

With the intervention of less than a week, he was now as cold as on that first visit he had been passionate.

This was a riddle to the Curate, who knew nothing of Bowie's meeting with Miriam. The intelligent reader will see in it the influence that one pure woman had on a mind not devoid of nobility.

James Bowie was a man whose life had received a new impetus in the right—the upward direction. During those days he had an abstracted air. He was passing his whole life in review, weighing all by the standard an hour's acquaintance with Miriam had given him.

Keenly he felt the unworthiness of much that gave its darkest tints to the panorama. It made him bitter and a little defiant. It was not strong enough to make him resolve to remodel his life. But with Miriam fresh in his mind it seemed almost like sacrilege to seek Leoline again.

Meanwhile, albeit not a gambler (that is to say, not more than was customary among Southerners generally) he played with the Curate, caring little whether he lost or won. The Curate was in some way connected with Miriam. Though Bowie would not violate her prohibition, he hoped circumstances might remove the obstacle. He waited.

So Fate found them sitting *tete-a-tete* in Jerry Camp's gambling *salle*, between them a round, porphyry-topped table whose crossed gilt legs gave it the graceful appearance of an hour-glass—on the table, cards, money and wine-glasses.

At the moment we introduce them to the reader, the Curate had half-risen from his chair, clutching with his left hand the money

while he shook a card in the face of his opponent, crying with wolfish fierceness:

"Cheat! Thief! Hah! I have detected you at last!"

Without giving the other time to reply, he turned and flourished the card above his head, shouting with savage exultation:

"What, hol gentlemen, we have a swindling trickster among us!"

Something between a groan and a howl resounded through the apartment, responsive to this call. In a twinkling the other tables were deserted, and from all parts of the room, with a shuffling of feet and jostling of bodies, a crowd of men, all frowning resentfully, and many, with haggard faces and blood-shot eyes that looked murderous hatred, thronged toward the center of excitement.

To these men who staked wealth, honor—nay, life itself on the turn of a die, a cheat was a monster so utterly detestable that annihilation alone could appease their sense of wrong.

James Bowie was a man whose iron nerve nothing could daunt. Arraigned at the bar of public opinion on a charge which, if substantiated, would strip him of honor—that intangible something which "Southern chivalry" held before life itself—he did not even rise from his chair, but sat like a man of ice.

Yet over his face spread a pallor like that of death, the muscles grew tense and hard, his eyes contracted until their blue irides took on a steely glitter beneath his knit brows.

In that moment all that was good in the man vanished and all that was evil in his passionate nature took its place, like the shifting of dissolving views. A moment ago he was a man of flesh and blood, with human sympathies—now he was a man of iron, who would exact retribution to the last jot and tittle!

He did not deign so much as a glance to the crowd of excited men gathering about him; but gazed fixedly at his accuser, who, violently shaking the card which he held between his finger and thumb, and his face working convulsively with malignant menace, parted:

"Hah! I have you at last!—I have you at last! This is how my money has gone! This is why fortune has defied all calculation and belied herself! Hah! you knave!—you rascal!—you cheat!—you humbug!—you blackleg!—you card-sharp!—you—"

"Will you be explicit in your charge?" demanded Bowie, icily.

"A marked-card, you scoundrel! See! see!" cried the Curate, fiercely, holding the card before Bowie's eyes so close that it almost touched his face.

Then carrying it round before the circle of lowering faces, he repeated:

"Behold all!"

"A marked card!" echoed the bystanders; and their faces grew more ominous.

"Gentlemen," said the accused, in a firm voice, not removing his fixed gaze, however, from the face of the man who had called him a cheat, "there are the cards. Please to examine them."

Half a dozen hands were outstretched, but one man brushed them all aside.

"Stop, gentlemen!" he protested. "We can't all do this thing. Let us proceed systematically, and leave it to one man whose knowledge and honesty we can rely on."

"That's the correct thing; and Jerry Camp's just the man we want. I move that Jerry Camp be appointed an investigating committee of one."

"Gentlemen, are you all agreed?"

"Camp!—Camp!—Camp!"

"Mr. Jerry Camp!" called the first speaker.

"Right this way."

"Make room there!"

The crowd parted to give passage to the dealer, who, until called away by the general demand, had continued to sit impassively at his post at the faro-table.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a low tone, bowing and rubbing his hands one over the other with a wringing motion, "if I can serve you, command me."

"Examine those cards, and tell us whether they are marked, if you please."

"And begin with this, pray!" cried the Curate, thrusting before the arbiter the card which had aroused his suspicions.

Jerry Camp bowed, received the card, examined it critically, and laid it on the table, his face betraying absolutely nothing to the eager eyes that sought to read it.

Picking up the remainder of the pack, he set the cards in motion, gliding one over the other as if propelled by the folds of a serpent.

When he had examined each critically, yet

rapidly, he laid the pack quietly on the table, and then spoke.

"Gentlemen, but one card bears a mark of any kind; and it is my opinion that that is the result of accident, not design."

A sigh of relief passed over the crowd, and most of the faces cleared instantly.

A slightly-increased contraction of the eye was the only betrayal of emotion on Bowie's part.

The Curate stood a moment in dumb amazement, and then burst forth:

"It is false! You are leagued to defraud me—you whom I so nearly crushed! You!—you are the impartial judge! Is it not to your interest to prevent me from getting another foothold? Well you know that the next time I will fall upon you like an avalanche and grind you to powder! I denounce you as knaves and swindlers all!"

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### A DUEL IN THE DARK.

SUCH words could not pass unaccounted for. Everybody knew—with little concern, if the truth may be told—that a duel—if not more than one—was inevitable.

Now like an irresistible piece of mechanism James Bowie rose from his chair until he towered to his full height.

"Sir," he said, in a tone like the ring of an iron bell, never having removed his eyes from the face of the man who had impeached his honor, "you have had your fling. Now comes the reckoning! Shall you keep me long waiting?"

"No, by all the Furies!" shouted the Curate.

"And, sir, you will not deny me the honor, after this gentleman?"

Jerry Camp bowed low as he proffered the challenge, presenting his card held between the fore and middle fingers. His small, penetrating eyes and his sinuous motions made him look like a human adder.

"Your servant, sir!" retorted the Curate, with savage formality, giving in exchange a card bearing the name:

"ARTHUR WINGATE."

"Thanks," returned the faro-dealer. "My friends can wait upon you—"

"At the Hotel Bourbon, to-morrow, at ten o'clock."

Jerry Camp bowed and returned to his table.

A duel being of less personal interest than the exposure of a cheat, the other gamblers dispersed to their several games, leaving the disputants almost alone.

"Now, sir, we are ready for the arbitration of the Fates; and may Fortune favor the right!" said the Curate.

"I am at your command," replied Bowie, coldly.

"And it is mine to determine the weapons!"

"According to custom."

The Curate held out his hand, so that its tremulousness was apparent.

"It shall not be by the pistol," he said, "for years have shaken the nerve that once was as firm as yours; and the bullet would fly wide of its mark, directed by so unsteady a hand. But age has not robbed me of my gripe. Therefore, I select the knife—the weapon so peculiarly your own. You find no fault with this?"

"I find fault with nothing. Go on!"

"Again. Once I could look at the sun without flinching. But turning night into day has weakened my sight. In quickness of the eye you would have an advantage over me. Therefore, let us fight in the dark. Are you agreeable?"

"I agree to anything, so that we lose no more time!" said Bowie, impatiently.

"Come, then!"

"I attend you."

The Curate, followed by Bowie, immediately left the gambling-hall by a door which gave into a fashionable restaurant, which served as a vestibule, so to speak, to the den of deeper infamy within.

Stopping before a man who had an air of proprietorship, he asked:

"Mr. Lingham, have you a room to which the light of day never gains admittance, for which we can compensate you in money, if its floor be somewhat dabbled with blood?"

The proprietor started, looked at the lowering faces of his patrons, and comprehended the situation at once.

"Why, gentlemen," he began, a little nervously, "allow me to expostulate—"

"Bah!" interrupted the Curate; "we are in no mood for shilly-shally! Have you or have you not such a room?"

"Certainly!—certainly, I have the room."

"Can we have it at once?"



"Yes."

"Show us the way!"

"You have seconds?" suggested the proprietor.

"We want none. If you wish witnesses to clear yourself, you are welcome to procure them."

"A surgeon, at least?"

"One can be called if needed. It is not my purpose to leave room for patching!" muttered the Curate, savagely.

Bowie remained silent.

"Gentlemen, I will be with you in a moment," said the proprietor, and hastened away, ostensibly for a key.

But while he was away he whispered in the ear of an attendant:

"Fetch Dr. Meredith without a moment's delay!"

Five minutes later the duelists stood at opposite ends of a room perhaps twelve by twenty feet in extent, in their stocking-feet and stripped to the waist.

Their only weapon was the famous (or infamous) Bowie knife.

They stood half-crouching, each with his eye fixed on that of his antagonist.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" called Dick Lingham, from the doorway.

A harsh, grating ejaculation of assent came from each of the contestants.

The door was shut and locked, and, for life or death, they were wrapped in impenetrable darkness! One—perhaps both!—might never see the light of day again!

A moment later Dr. Meredith appeared, looking gravely anxious. He was a Northern man, and not yet familiar enough with the Southern Fire-eater's ready appeal to the "code" to look upon it complacently.

He was already informed of the situation, and stood mutely beside the proprietor of the restaurant awaiting the demand on his skill.

Within the chamber of death prevailed an ominous stillness. Those without waited in constantly increasing excitement, listening with bated breath.

The suspense was horrible. It seemed as if it would never end.

At last there came a savage, snarling sound, causing all hearts to leap, and then stand still. It was followed by the noise of a desperate struggle, in which the contestants must have surged back and forth through the darkened room, giving blow on blow.

"My God, gentlemen!" cried Dr. Meredith, "this is murder! Cannot it be stopped?"

Dick Lingham raised his hand in silence.

No one else offered to interfere.

At last came a fall, followed by groans and the thud of falling limbs, as of some one still struggling feebly.

Finally, dead, palpable silence reigned once more!

"In Heaven's name! now open the door!" again urged Dr. Meredith, starting forward.

Dick Lingham, who "had been there," put his hand on the knob, and still said:

"Wait!"

The struggle might be renewed.

A minute—two—passed, the longest Dr. Meredith ever experienced, then came the sound of some one dragging himself across the floor. It stopped, and a groan resounded hollowly through the empty room.

"Now then, gentlemen, I think the affair is over, and we may enter."

And Dick Lingham opened the door.

## CHAPTER XV.

### WHO SUFFERS.

THE sight that met the view was enough to make the stoutest heart quail.

The Curate lay on his back, ominously motionless, horribly dabbled with blood.

James Bowie sat at a little distance, supporting himself with one hand and with the other trying to stanch the blood that oozed from a terrible gash in his breast. Blood that streamed over his face and shoulders from one or more wounds in his head made the spectator shudder with horror.

He looked up as the men entered the room.

"Gentlemen," he said, faintly, "I reckon he's done. But he was the devil and all. I'm lucky if he hasn't given me my quietus. Can you get me out of this? Perhaps I can walk, with help."

They helped him to rise, and between two of them he walked with tottering steps.

The Curate was lifted and borne to a room where Dr. Meredith gave him immediate attention. He was found to be hacked and gashed terribly, and though no vital part had been reached directly, it would be impossible for him

to rally. If he could be kept alive twenty-four hours, it would only be by artificial means.

Miriam was sent for, and Dr. Meredith then gave attention to James Bowie.

Although he had bled a great deal from half a dozen wounds, his hurts were not necessarily serious. Bowie's own wish he was put into a carriage and taken, Dr. Meredith knew not whither.

Of all present none knew even his name.

The affair had been conducted according to "the code." This satisfied all the witnesses. Before the matter got to the ears of the police, who would have made some formal show of carrying out the written law, which, however, custom made practically a dead-letter, the only actor likely to survive was beyond their slipshod search.

Meanwhile, Dr. Meredith waited before the restaurant for the carriage which was to bring Miriam.

Seeing him, she leaped out almost before the carriage stopped.

She was the ghost of even her frail self. Her white face, her staring eyes, her quivering lips made Dr. Meredith's heart ache.

He felt that her hands were like ice as she seized upon his, clinging to them as if he were her only hope.

"Oh! what is the matter?" she panted.

"What has happened to my father?"

"Hush!" said the doctor. "Come; we will go to him at once."

She could scarcely walk, her limbs trembled so; and now the tears streamed from her eyes so that she could not see her way.

Gently Dr. Meredith led her to an apartment where he had her take off her hat and bathe her face to remove the traces of her tears.

"I will tell you now," he said, "that your father has been very dangerously hurt. You must not excite him by betraying emotion. Now, make an effort to control yourself."

He took her hands and held them firmly in his. It calmed her.

Bravely she fought back the tears; then looking up into the doctor's face almost like a child, she asked:

"May I go now?"

He never forgot her face as it looked then. In all his life he had not seen such childlike innocence and sweetness of expression.

Without a word he took her to the room where her father lay. One moment he paused with his hand on the knob of the door.

"I can rely on your self-command," he said.

"Your father's well-being requires it."

She answered him with a look.

He opened the door, and she glided in like a spirit.

The man closed the door and stood leaning his head against the door-post. His brows were knit, and there were lines of pain on his face.

His fancy had flown a thousand miles away to far Boston, and this is the picture it conjured up:

A lady, tall and statuesque, whose cold, intellectual beauty and hair slightly streaked with gray gave her a queen-like dignity. Beside her a copy of herself with the difference of a quarter of a century, the lines filled out and color supplied by the freshness of youth.

Before these two Miriam looking at them as she had looked at him a moment ago when asking him if she could go to her father.

In imagination he saw the elder lady draw her rustling skirts about her and heard her frigid tones as she said:

"A gambler's daughter!"

The younger woman—so his fancy pictured it—met Miriam's pleading gaze with a stony stare which did not deign the least show of emotion.

So pained was the dreamer at this that he involuntarily pressed his hand over his eyes to shut out the spectacle.

This only made a background of darkness out of which the face looked at him sadly, reproachfully, so that he began to pace the hall to quiet his perturbed thoughts.

Meanwhile, Miriam had moved to her father's bedside. He was in a partial doze induced by weakness, and was not aware of her vicinity until a tremulous sigh escaped her lips. Then he opened his eyes and saw her standing beside him with clasped hands, gazing at him with all her tender soul in her eyes.

Dr. Meredith had made it his special care to fix the wounded gambler so that his daughter would not be too greatly shocked at sight of him. There were no wounds visible. Bowie had done his work well. Every thrust of his murderous knife had been received somewhere in the body. Only the gray pallor of his face showed how near the Curate lay to death.

"Miriam, my poor child?" he breathed, faintly.

"Father!"

And she bent over him, putting her arms around each side of him, not touching him, lest she should hurt him, only resting her cheek against his.

He could feel her tremble and hear her quivering breath.

"Ah! my darling!" he sighed, "when we give the rein to our passions we do not reflect that it is you who suffer."

"Hush!" she whispered. "I have come not to talk of what is passed, but to nurse you back to health and strength. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing. My day is over. By my own rash act I have cut off all your future. The dream of my life will fall through one moment of madness. Ah! my little one, when I think of it I could die of self-reproach."

She stopped his lips with hers, and a tear fell upon his face.

"Miriam," he said presently, "I shall never recover from this."

"Father!"

"Let us face the truth. My time is short enough. What is to become of you, my child, when I am gone?"

"Do not think of me, dear father—"

"I must. I can see now that I have been a terrible drag on you. But, oh! believe that it was because I hoped to repay you a thousand fold!"

"I do! I do!"

"I have cost you many an hour of weary toil and heart-breaking anxiety, and yet while I lived you had a protector. It will be different when you are utterly alone. Ah! who will watch over you then?"

As if in answer to the question, a knock sounded softly on the door.

It opened. M. de Calignay entered and crossed the room to the bedside on tiptoe.

His hands were clasped as if he were wringing them in keen distress. His face was pale (because he felt that the crisis of all his plotting was at hand) and drawn with lines of simulated pain.

He clasped the Curate's hand in one of his and laid the other on Miriam's bowed head.

"Ah! what sad calamity has fallen upon us all!" he sighed, and a tear gathered in his eye.

A smile broke over the Curate's face.

Ah! Miriam, the toils are closing about thee!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### "GIVE HER TO ME!"

M. DE CALIGNAY kept so close a watch on the doings of the Curate that news of the duel and its probably fatal results was not long in reaching him.

"Sot!" (fool) he cried. "Has he spoiled all? Could not'ing keep him from his stupid duel? If he is dead, I have wasted time and trouble on him. But if I find him alive—ah! who knows?—let us not despair—it may be the key to my fortune. If I can put in operation the plan I formed when he lay stricken with paralysis, then all is saved. But zero is Leoline! Ah! she would rend *la petite* Miriam, if she knew. Her jealous fury will spoil all. But no; she must yield. If I can assure her of my truth. Well! well! if note, *I will tame her!*"

M. de Calignay's eyes grew round beneath his deeply-corrugated brows and his mouth took on a hard, cruel set which boded no leniency to Leoline, if she tried to balk his plans.

With long, rapid strides he sought Jerry Camp's gambling palace.

Dick Lingham's restaurant was crowded with men discussing the tragedy. Dick was reaping a golden harvest from his local sensation.

To these M. de Calignay gave no heed. An attendant informed him where the Curate lay.

"Has his daughter been sent for?" asked the Frenchman.

"She is with him now," was the reply.

M. de Calignay passed on, but stopped short at sight of Dr. Meredith pacing the hall before the door.

"Ah! zat devil has again risen in my path! He is before me!" he muttered, grinding his teeth and scowling furiously. "Well, if he becomes dangerous, he will be removed!"

Dr. Meredith turned.

Like lightning the expression of the Frenchman's face changed. Hatred gave place to grief like the dropping of a mask.

"Ah! my dear Dr. Meredith, you are in attendance?" he exclaimed, clasping the doctor's hand in both of his.

"Yes," replied the doctor.



"And my poor friend—how have you found him?"

"A doomed man!"

"Ah! You shock me! It is not so bad—surely, it is not so bad?"

"He cannot live twenty-four hours. If he were a younger man or had led a different life, he might rally. But not he. His nervous force has been squandered. Now he will die for want of it."

"*Mon Dieu!* I cannot tell the pain you cause me! His child!—ah! I think of her!"

"She is at his bedside. She is indeed to be pitied."

"And you have told her that she will be an orphan so soon?"

"No, I dared not tell her. I thought it better to let the truth come to her by degrees, from her own observation."

"Ah! the kindness of heart! You have my gratitude for your consideration for one whom I love as dearly as if she were already my own."

Dr. Meredith started, flushed, then turned pale. He had never thought of M. de Calignay as a possible lover of Miriam; but as he looked at him now he saw that the disparity was not greater than that often seen between man and wife.

The Frenchman was on the summer side of forty, and unquestionably a fine-looking man, physically. Why should not she love and wed him?

Dr. Meredith recalled the look and tone of M. de Calignay when the latter offered him the glass of water after Miriam's fainting-fit. What had they meant? Proprietorship?

The thought brought blended emotions to the doctor's heart.

First a sense of relief that Fate had taken out of his hands a question that was rapidly becoming a haunting torture to him. But it was a desperate sort of satisfaction, such as a criminal might feel on receiving sentence after a protracted trial in which suspense had become worse than certain death. And with this feeling came a dreary sense of desolation and loss.

"You wish to see your friends?" he asked, for he felt creeping over him a strong sense of aversion to the Frenchman which rendered mere physical proximity painful. He ascribed this to jealousy, and felt that it was unworthy; but it mastered him, and he knocked on the door and then opened it, so that M. de Calignay could not well prolong the conversation.

When the Frenchman had entered the room, a new feeling took possession of the doctor. He seemed to have abandoned Miriam to one who would not work her true weal. So with conflicting emotions Dr. Meredith tortured himself.

Meanwhile, the Curate had welcomed M. de Calignay, his false friend, with a smile.

"Ah! was his reflection, 'this is the protector of my child. Fate sent him just as I asked the question. I will take it as a good omen. And he has been so kind to us both he cannot desert her now.'"

"My good friend, do I find you again stricken down? Alas! my brother, what have you done? Had you no thought of your child—our child—may I not call her so, since I love her tenderly?"

"I deserve your reproach, Calignay; and yet you are too kind to make it bitter," said the Curate. "Yes, I have been cruel to her—"

"Father, I cannot bear to hear you talk like this," sobbed Miriam.

"I see it more clearly now, my child, and I cannot help reproaching myself. Hoping to gain all, I have denied you much that I should have given you. Now that all is lost, I have the bitterness of leaving you desolate and destitute."

"Not while I live, my good friend!" protested M. de Calignay, putting an arm protectingly about Miriam. "When you are gone she becomes my care."

The girl rewarded him with a look of deep gratitude.

"Spoken like my generous friend!" cried the Curate, his eyes becoming humid. "Ah! Calignay, how can I repay you all I owe you? But you will believe that I meant to pay you every cent?"

"Can you speak of that at such a time?" cried M. de Calignay, apparently much hurt. "Ah! my friend, how little you have known me. Had I not loved you as I do, I would have done it all and more for Miriam's sake. But let the past go. We must look at the future."

"That is what pains me—to leave a young girl all unprotected to the world."

"Father! Father! Father!"

And with a wild burst of grief Miriam clutch-

ed her parent's hands, throwing herself on her knees at the bedside.

All the barriers of self-control were down, swept away by the mighty flood of an uncontrollable grief. The girl shivered with dread, and sobbed and moaned in a way that would have moved the sternest heart.

Dr. Meredith knocked on the door and entered the room.

"Come!" he said, taking her gently by the wrist. "You must go and calm yourself. You shall return as soon as you have regained self-control."

"No! no! no! no!" she cried, wildly. "He will die while I am away! Oh! father! father! father!"

With gentle force Dr. Meredith and M. de Calignay unclasped her fingers and bore her almost fainting from the room.

While Dr. Meredith set himself to soothe her, M. de Calignay returned to the Curate.

"Calignay," continued the gambler, picking up the thread of conversation where he had left off, "I cannot lose sight of the temptations that surround a young girl who is cursed with poverty. With all your kindness you cannot protect her as a father would. I have done so until now by secluding her from the outside world. And now if she were only married to one who would throw around her the protection of a home, I should die easier."

"Give her to me!" cried M. de Calignay, extending his arms impulsively.

"To you?" exclaimed the Curate, in surprise.

"Ah! my friend!" cried the Frenchman, seeming to be suddenly overwhelmed by a flood of emotion, "if you only knew how I have loved her—how I do love her! You have often expressed gratitude for little services I have rendered you from time to time. Shall I be frank?—it was because you were her father. When I came ostensibly to see you, I could feast my eyes on her loveliness and grace, and listen to the sound of her voice. My good friend, you know me—you know what I have to offer her. Not opulence, grandeur, ostentation; but a home that will have every comfort and enough of the luxuries of life to make her envied by many. And she will be the apple of my eye! Ah! my friend, give her to me! As her husband I can hedge her round about; but only as her father's friend—ah! you know the world!—my most tender care of her would be turned to poison!"

There were tears in the Curate's eyes.

"Calignay," he said, "I have not words to express my feelings. If I could see her your wife, I should know that her future was assured. But are you sure that you love her so—that it is not pity for her desolate condition?"

"My friend," interrupted the Frenchman, "her smile—the touch of her hand is heaven to me! I have longed to speak to you of this, but I feared that your hopes for her future would lead you to reject my suit. Now that all is abandoned, and I can offer her a brighter future than she can hope for without me, I am bold to say—give her to me!"

"Alas! her future is blighted! With means at my command I might have wrested for her the fortune that is hers of right; but after my death the case is hopeless. She has no prospects save those your disinterested offer opens to her, and I wish it were carried into effect already."

"While I believe that I am not repugnant to her, I cannot hope to fill her romantic ideal, which shall have ten or a dozen years' advantage of me," said the Frenchman. "For this reason she cannot have looked upon me as a lover. But she has confidence in your love and will yield to your judgment as to what is for her real well-being. If you put it as your dying wish to see us united, she cannot refuse; and she will have my care before your hold upon her relaxes."

"Calignay, it shall be so. Bring her to me. I will secure her consent, and the marriage can take place before I die."

"It will be very abrupt. Let her be surrounded by her friends. As yet Mlle. Leoline knows nothing of your misfortune. I will fetch her. It will make it easier for the dear child. Ah! my brother, sad as I am over the irreparable loss which I feel is impending, there is music in my soul! I am selfish? Do I love you less?"

"No! no! Calignay. I would not have it otherwise. I am glad that my child brings you happiness. In return you will give her peace and security."

A tear fell from the Frenchman's eyes upon the Curate's hand as he pressed it to his lips.

Alas! poor Miriam!

## CHAPTER XVII.

### "YOUR WIFE! NEVER!"

M. DE CALIGNAY had no time to lose.

"Leoline must be won or compelled to become my auxiliary," he reflected. "It will cost a struggle; but if I mistake not, I am master here! She must prepare Miriam for her father's requirement. He must note her repugnance from her, or he will recede from his purpose. Now her acting must serve us as it has done before. Ah! it will be rare sport to see her veil her jealous fury with smiles—to see her kiss where she would bite, and caress where she would rend!"

The innate cruelty of the man appeared in the smile that this reflection called to his lips as he walked rapidly in quest of Leoline. As much as his selfish nature would permit he loved her; and yet he could bear to give her pain.

Called from her sleep, the actress did not keep him waiting, but received him in a dressing-gown. In this tasteful *negligee*, for everything about her had reference to her personal appearance, her charms appeared at their greatest advantage. She obeyed the laws of health as carefully as her vocation would permit, and nature rewarded her by giving her immunity from the tyranny of cosmetics. So it was no pallid face and jaded air that welcomed M. de Calignay, but rather the rosy freshness of a child awakened from slumber.

"Ah!" ejaculated the Frenchman, with keen appreciation. "In each new guise you are more beautiful than before. Leoline, the world holds none your peer!"

"Accept the reward for your pretty speech," she said, offering her lips for his caress. "But what brings you here at this hour, Raoul? And you are pale with excitement! What is it?"

"Leoline, the crisis of our life!"

"How? What has happened?"

"Our excellent friend, the Curate, has ever our interests at heart. Ha! ha! ha!"

"What has he done?"

"You would never guess. He has fought a duel!"

"He? Impossible!"

"*Parbleu!* why not he?"

"But for what?"

"A quarrel over the card."

"And with whom?"

"I do not know. A stranger."

"Was he killed?"

"*Diable!* no. What would be the value of his carcass to us? He is living; but he will make it convenient to die before his time to-morrow. Meanwhile, the remnant of his life will be devoted to enrich us."

"You speak in riddles. How, pray?"

"It is a long story. Let us begin. Leoline, do you love me?"

"Love you, Raoul?"

"Exactly."

"Why do you ask so strange a question? and what has that to do with the Curate?"

"*Eh bien!* cannot you say—yes!—no! Must you multiply questions? Is it not simple? Do you love me?—do you not love me?"

"Certainly I love you. But it is so—"

"*Tiens!* It is sufficient—'yes!' Now, how much do you love me?"

The actress looked at him in bewilderment.

"*Allons! allons!*" he cried. "How much?"

A soft flush came into the woman's cheeks, and the humidity of deep emotion sprang to her eyes.

"Raoul," she said, nestling close to his side, and resting her head on his breast, "more than everybody and everything else in all the world!"

"Good!" cried the Frenchman, caressing her hair. "Now, *ma chérie*, do you believe that I love you?"

"What is to come of all this, Raoul?" asked the actress, smiling wonderingly up into his face.

"Answer! answer!"

"Well, you have always told me so."

"Who believes all that he hears?" asked the Frenchman, with a shrug.

"You have always acted as if you loved me."

"*Parbleu!* you act as if you loved *Mademoiselle* Miriam!"

"While I hate her like death!" cried Leoline, flushing with passion. "But you do not hate me, Raoul?"

"You are sure?"

"Yes!" she replied, looking straight into his eyes, with a confident smile.

"Then you believe that I love you?"

"I know it!"

"Good! If you always answer like that, we shall get along most famously. Well, how much do I love you?"



"Ah! how can I tell that?" she asked, archly.  
 "But you must have an opinion."

In silence she looked into his face, trying to fathom what was in his thoughts. The strangeness of his coming to her at such a time to ask her such questions, his evident excitement, the relation of these things to the Curate's impending death, and their enrichment somehow growing out of it—all this began to impress her with the gravity of the occasion, and gradually the smile faded from her lips.

"Well?" asked M. de Calignay, who had watched the changes in her countenance.

"Raoul," she asked, "how would you have me answer you?"

"Truthfully!"

"Well, I believe that you love me very much indeed," she said, slowly, looking steadily into his eyes.

"As much as you do me?" he asked.

At that a great wave of emotion swept over her, fetching the blood in a torrent to her face. Passionately she threw her arms about his neck, bringing her face close to his, while her suffused eyes fastened upon his with a hungry look.

"Ah! Raoul, if you do!" she murmured, with almost a sob.

"Would you believe me if I were to say it?" he asked.

"Yes!" she cried, eagerly.

As she hung on his neck, the man brushed the hair back from her temples, and, holding her face between his palms, gazed intently into her eyes.

"Leoline," he said, in a tone of deep seriousness that she had never known him to employ before, "believe—for it is true—*zat* during ze twenty year and more since my early manhood I have never seen a woman who satisfied me until I saw you! Believe *zat* you do satisfy me, and *zat* in ze moment I beheld you I resolved to possess you. Believe *zat* after you all women are insipid to me! I have room in my heart for but one idol—all ze rest are but clay!"

There was no doubting the strong passionate earnestness of the man. He spoke from the soul. He could not have chosen more accurate terms to define his love. He loved her because she satisfied him. He did not add, as he might have done with truth, that should he meet another woman who satisfied him more completely, and were she within his reach, he would turn from his present allegiance without a shadow of regret, and follow his new idol. But for the present it was as he said—after Leoline all other women were indifferent to him.

As this assurance sunk into her heart, all the craving of the woman's nature was satisfied. The rein of repression by which she had hidden her passionate longing for him was suddenly relaxed; and straining him in a close embrace she hid her face in his neck, where she could only reiterate:

"Raoul! Raoul! Raoul! Raoul!"

Such deep love from the woman he had set apart from all others could not but be grateful to M. de Calignay. Perhaps most men would have taken it as the measure of the pain the proposal he contemplated would cause her, and spared her. M. de Calignay felt no such prompting.

"She will suffer from jealousy," he reflected; "but it is ze price she must pay for ze wealth *zat* will come after."

Aloud, he said:

"Leoline, how much do you love money—say a million and a quarter of dollars?"

"Raoul, can you speak of money at such a time as this?" asked the woman. "Ah! if I could rest as now forever, I would give up everything else!"

"Unfortunately, mortals must live," said the Frenchman. "To live comfortably wine must be added to beefsteak and potatoes. Most people do not quarrel with carriages and elegantly-furnished apartments. Leoline, would you make no sacrifice to obtain zese t'ings?"

"Ah! Raoul, you know my weakness!"

"Diamonds?"

"I love them!"

"What would you give to have every wish gratified—so far as a million and a quarter could gratify zem?"

"I would give up everything but you, Raoul!"

"Would you not give me up for a time—say a year—if zen we could live together in happiness?"

"Raoul, now that I know how much you love me, you are a hundred-fold more dear to me, and I long to end this waiting. But if a year would add so much to your life, I would wait patiently."

"Leoline," said M. de Calignay, impressively, "a million and a quarter of dollars are waiting for you and me; but it can be got only by a

great sacrifice and great patience and great trust on your part. Will you make ze sacrifice of feeling?—will you exercise ze patience?—will you repose ze trust?"

The woman began to tremble with apprehension.

"I must not give you up, Raoul?"

"In one sense, yes—in one sense, no. Apparently—to ze world—you renounce me forever. Practically, our relations remain ze same as now."

"But I can never marry you, Raoul?"

"At ze end of a year or a year and a half, you can marry me, worth a million or more dollars!"

"Ah! Raoul, how is all this to come about?"

"Once more, do you trust me? Do you believe *zat* my only aim is to get *zis* money *zat* I may enjoy it with you?"

"Yes, I believe you!"

"No matter what I ask of you, you will believe *zat* *zis* is ze end—ze only end! You will trust me?"

"Yes, Raoul!"

"Implicitly!"

"Implicitly."

"Well, attend. Ze Curate is heir to a million and a quarter."

"Yes."

"He will die."

"Yes."

"Miriam becomes heir."

"Well?"

"She will get ze money."

"And then?"

"To get ze money from her I must—"

"What?"

"You trust me? You believe *zat* I love you, and only you?—*zat* it is for you I act?"

"Yes. Well?"

"To get ze money from her, I must make her my wife."

The woman gazed at the man in dumb amazement. Her arms relaxed and fell away from his neck. She seemed to shrink within herself, while every vestige of color faded from her face.

"Your wife!" she repeated, in a hoarse whisper.

"For a day only—"

"YOUR WIFE!" interrupted the actress, now in clear tones, while she rose to her feet. "Never!—for a day!—for an hour!—for a minute!—for a second!—for the millionth part of an atom of time!—*never! NEVER! NEVER!*"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### M. DE CALIGNAY CONQUERS.

"SHE your wife!" cried the actress, raising her clenched hand, "*I would strangle her at the altar!*"

M. de Calignay remained seated, showing no trace of emotion, save the pallor of calm determination.

"Leoline," he said quietly, you do not understand me fully."

"God in Heaven!" cried the excited woman. "I understand this—that you wish to marry her! But do you dream that I will permit it? Never! She will not live to become your wife! Oh! Raoul! Raoul! you have deceived me!—me who would have placed my hair beneath your feet!"

And casting herself on the floor the passionate woman abandoned herself to a frenzy of grief, calling upon death to relieve her from her sufferings.

M. de Calignay sat perfectly still gnawing his nether lip and looking at the woman with a frown.

He understood woman-nature. He knew that the storm must pass before he could talk to her. He waited, not over-patiently.

Gradually the passionate words sunk into moans, the moans into sobs, the sobs into sighs, and the woman lay still, exhausted.

Then M. de Calignay knew that his time was come.

"Leoline," he said, kindly yet firmly, "I am not surprised at your display of emotion. I knew *zat* it must come and pass. It is note from lack of love *zat* I have left you to exhaust yourself. I tried to prepare you. If you had listened to me to ze end, you would have spared yourself much unnecessary pain. But I knew with your passionate nature *zis* could note be."

"I have given you every verbal assurance *zat* I love you, and only you. I can derive no pleasure from association with any one but you. A marriage which would separate us would make me as unhappy as you."

"And do you dare to propose that while she is your wife I shall be—"

"Not'ing of ze kind! You shall be my wife before all ze world! Will you listen quietly?"

"So indifferent am I to ze person of *zis* child *zat* I propose *zat* her marriage shall be one in name only. She shall be my wife in just so far as will give me control over her actions, so *zat* I can get *zis* money—no further. From ze time *zat* ze law shall make her Madame de Calignay till she lies dead in her grave, I do not care to so much as touch her hand."

"But before ze world she must be my wife. Her actions must be free from outside inspection. My wife can convert her real estate into stocks and bonds, with no one to ask why—my ward could note. At my wife's death her personal property becomes mine—my ward's would note. Do you see why legally she must be my wife? After I got her money in my hands, how long would you let her live?"

"NOT AN INSTANT!"

"Ah, yes! she would die gradually. Sudden deaths interest ze coroner! Leoline, she will note usurp your place. Cannote you give her ze poor privilege of bearing my name a few months for a million dollars? For ze pain it costs you, you can have your revenge."

"Raoul!" cried the woman, not lifting her head from the floor, "I cannot endure it!—I cannot!—I cannot!—I cannot! I should die at seeing any one else your wife, even in name. Ah! how cruel you are! Do you think of the days of waiting and the nights of torture? I would not have a moment's peace for fear that somehow she might win you. When she was really yours, what might not happen? No! no! no! no! it is an impossible marriage. Who ever heard of such a thing? A wife and yet no wife! No! no! no! no! a thousand times no!"

Quietly M. de Calignay rose, went over to her and said:

"Come, you have lain here long enough."

She drew herself together like a child that requires coaxing, holding her hands tightly over her face.

M. de Calignay lifted her bodily in his arms, bore her to the sofa, and set her beside him.

She rested against his breast as he placed her, but would not remove her hands.

"Leoline," he said, in his firm yet not unkindly tones—for M. de Calignay could be patient when it best served his purpose—"you have said *zat* you believed *zat* I loved you as you love me. Put yourself in my place. Suppose you were ze man, with ze love you now feel. Could note you do as I propose with no disloyalty to ze woman you loved? How would you feel toward ze woman you married?"

"I should hate the very sight of her for standing between me and the woman I loved!" cried the actress, passionately. "I could not bear to touch her unless it was to crush her, so as to remove her from my path!"

"Ah! you would feel so! And do you think I would languish with caresses for ze woman who stood between you and me?"

"Raoul!" cried the actress, suddenly removing her hands and gazing appealingly into his eyes, "let us give up this money. I love you—you love me. We have enough to live on. Let us go and be all-in-all to each other. I will give every hour, every minute of the day to your happiness—"

"Enough! It cannot be! I have marked out ze path. We must walk in it."

The woman uttered a sharp cry of pain and despair, again covered her face with her hands, and sat quivering in a terrible struggle.

M. de Calignay drew her upon his breast and began to stroke her hair. He said not a word. He waited.

There was a long pause. Then the woman spoke in a low, restrained voice:

"Raoul, you cannot induce her to enter into such an arrangement as this. If she does not wish to be your wife in fact, she will not marry you at all."

"On ze contrary, I doubt if she could be induced to marry me on any other understanding. *Parbleu!* she does note love me! She is grateful to me. I am her father's friend—her uncle, if you will, by courtesy; but her lover!—she has never dreamed of such a t'ing!"

"Then she will refuse to marry you altogether. She has nothing to gain."

"Note? Let us see. Her father, dying, leaves her, a young girl, unprotected, in poverty. To him I have offered to marry her, protesting my secret love for her, which has awaited *zis* blighting of her prospects before it dared proclaim itself; and he, seeing in me a protector and a home, is ready to lay his commands on her. His dying wish would weigh much with her, but would it induce her to tie herself for life to a man for whom she cared nothing? Note so!"

"Allons! I tell her *zat* as a stranger I can do



nothing for her. The evil tongue of the world will compel us to sever even the friendship which now exists between us. But if she will consent to become my wife before the law only, for a few short months, I can secure for her her fortune, the marriage can then be nullified, and she be free again as to-day, with the difference of wealth at her command. She will think that her father sanctions this arrangement, since I will give her no opportunity to arrive at a different understanding—she is young and knows nothing of such things—she is in grief—it is her father's dying wish—behold! she is entrapped!"

"You have spoken to the Curate?" asked Leoline, and seemed to hold her breath for the answer.

"It is all arranged with him," said M. de Calignay. "Before it should be broken to Miriam I said: 'Let her be surrounded by her friends, and I came for you.'"

There was another long pause in which Leoline remained perfectly motionless. She could see no way of escape.

Presently she clasped M. de Calignay about the neck and hid her face in his breast.

"Raoul! Raoul! Raoul!" she cried, in a passionate appeal.

M. de Calignay knew that his conquest was at hand. He made no reply, but kissed her hair.

"Oh! I shall die! I shall die!" she cried again, clinging to him more desperately.

He clasped her close in his arms, laying his cheek on her bowed head, but said nothing.

She sobbed, she panted, she trembled in every nerve. It seemed like the rending of soul and body.

"Promise me, Raoul!" she suddenly cried—"promise me that you will be true to me in word, act, look, thought! Promise that she shall never be more to you than she has been in the past! Promise that you will never again kiss her, even as you have done! Oh! if you knew the torture it has been to me! Promise that you will never even touch her hand when it can be avoided! Promise that nothing shall ever pass between you that I would not consent to willingly, if I were by to see! Promise me, Raoul!—promise me everything!"

"I promise you this," said M. de Calignay—"not as a concession, but as a part of my plan—*that you shall live with us, and be present, if you wish, at every interview that I hold with Madame de Calignay.*"

Leoline threw her head back and gazed into his eyes as if she could read his soul.

"Do you mean this?" she asked.

"I swear it, by our faith!" he replied, solemnly, making the form of a cross in the air before his breast.

Once more she buried her face in his breast, straining him in her arms with all her strength. In that final struggle she held her breath until it seemed as if she would never breathe again. Then suddenly all her muscles relaxed, and she sunk limp and gasping in his embrace.

The fight was over. M. de Calignay had conquered!

#### CHAPTER XIX.

"EVERYTHING IS IN READINESS!"

AFTER a time the actress became calm. Then M. de Calignay broached her part in the plot.

"Leoline," he said, "I need your aid in carrying out this project."

"My aid? What can I do?"

"You must be the first to approach Miriam on the subject."

"I?"

"Yes. You are her friend—her sister. She will be amazed at the proposition, and at first, no doubt, refuse point-blank; but she will listen to your arguments and be persuaded in the end."

"I persuade her to become your wife!" cried the actress.

"There is no other way. Her father must see no marked repugnance on her part, or all is lost. If I make the proposal, she will not hear me out, but rush off to him at once. With you she will debate the matter until you lead her through the phases of stormy opposition, tremulous hesitation and final submission."

"Raoul, you ask me too much. I cannot endure it!"

"Oh, yes you can, and will, because you love me, and all our future happiness depends upon it. It is a rare field for your histrionic talents. You will have not only to simulate, but to dissemble. And you will succeed, as you have in the past."

"Raoul, you have given me a cruel task."

"What shall I say to her?"

"Zat I leave to your woman's ingenuity. You know what is requisite—*that she shall think that her father is a party to the plan as we present it*

to her. Prepare her so that she shall only ask him if it is his wish, so that no explanation shall pass between them. Come! we have no time to spare. Hasten to remove the traces of excessive emotion, and come with me."

"But, Raoul—oh! I tremble!—suppose we make this sacrifice and fail in the end? It will be a living death to me! Are you sure of the result?"

"Trust me for that. While you are getting ready I will go for the pearl of lawyers, Quirk. What he cannot do in the way of rascality may well be despaired of."

The man arose from the sofa.

The woman arose also and suddenly cast herself upon his breast.

"Raoul!" she cried, "take me in your arms once more, and assure me that nothing—*nothing* can ever turn your love from me!"

He did as she wished and then took his departure.

When he was gone she paced the room for a time like a caged lioness, then calming herself with an effort, set resolutely to work to prepare for his return.

Through the early morning M. de Calignay sought Ezreth Quirk, Esq. The lawyer was a late riser, in keeping with his general shiftlessness, and a scene similar to that depicted in a previous chapter was enacted before M. de Calignay gained access to him.

"Come!" said the Frenchman, "I must make a new man of you on short notice. How long is it since you had a bath?"

Quirk stared at his contemptuous interlocutor, and then grinned like a sneaking sycophant.

"Ha! ha! ha! my esteemed client, very good—very good indeed! Your wit reminds me of an old classmate of mine after he had become judge of the supreme—"

"You are drifting from the point. Let us waste no more time. Come!"

From the bosom of his interesting family M. de Calignay took Ezreth Quirk, Esq., to a barber-shop.

"Put this fellow through a thorough course," he said, as if giving an order with reference to his horse. "Wash him, shave him, and shear him!"

The barber grinned. Ezreth Quirk, Esq., smiled a rather cross-eyed smile. The stinging contempt of his master was beginning to penetrate to what little soul he had.

The barber did his work well, and Ezreth Quirk, Esq., was really in danger of taking cold from the unusual course of treatment.

"You must now shed these vile rags," said M. de Calignay, looking over the lawyer's certainly unostentatious wardrobe—the coat with the ink-stained sleeve and the slovenly pantaloons—as if they offended his nostrils. "But you must note look like a countryman in his holiday suit. Some second-hand dealer will make you presentable."

A second-hand furnisher gave Ezreth Quirk, Esq., an appearance which would attract no particular attention; but to the lawyer, who had not owned so respectable a suit within the recollection of his oldest child, the transformation was wonderful.

"Why, Mrs. Quirk will hardly know me, and the children will be shy until assured that I am not a stranger!" he cried, as he gazed at his reflection in a mirror. "May it please the Court, and—Gentlemen of the Jury!"

He started on an imaginary plea with a majestic wave of the hand; but M. de Calignay ruthlessly cut him short.

"Come! We have no time for monkey-shines! Follow me!"

It was a long time since Ezreth Quirk, Esq., had had a pocket without a hole in it. The first thing he now put in his new pockets was his dignity, if he could be said to have any, and followed M. de Calignay in all humility.

M. de Calignay next called upon a respectable clergyman and engaged him to be in attendance at a certain time.

This done, he sought Leoline, and with her and Ezreth Quirk, Esq., repaired to Jerry Camp's gambling palace, in one of the chambers of which the Curate lay.

With the coming of the Curate's seeming friends Dr. Meredith took his leave, to attend upon other patients who demanded his care.

Leoline took Miriam into a room apart.

The lawyer and his master remained with the dying gambler.

"I have brought my lawyer that he might receive any papers of value that you might wish preserved. I have heard you speak vaguely of expectations that you have entertained. If it should ever happen that Miriam and her children could be benefited, it is well to be prepared."

"Calignay, the claim is almost as old as the child herself, and I have despaired of it unless I should acquire means sufficient to prosecute it. All this time I have been flat on my back, and year after year has slipped by without bringing me an opportunity to establish my rights. Some day you may be able to secure to my child what belongs to her. Ah!—I grow faint!"

A stimulant was administered, and the Curate rallied so that he could transfer the papers, which he carried in a long wallet, and give information and instructions with reference to them. When this was over, the Curate was so much prostrated that he could scarcely speak.

At last the culminating moment of the plot came.

A knock sounded at the door.

M. de Calignay opened to an attendant.

"Mlle. Leoline sends to say that she awaits your pleasure," said he.

"Tell her that everything is in readiness, and she may come—Stay! I will escort her myself!"

And he went for his fellow-plotter and his victim.

#### CHAPTER XX.

LIKE A LAMB TO SLAUGHTER.

AFTER the passionate outburst of grief which had followed the realization of her father's condition, Miriam had lapsed into a sort of dazed apathy.

Leoline began by taking the gambler's daughter in her arms and weeping over her in seeming excess of sympathetic grief.

"Oh! my stricken friend—my afflicted sister!" she sobbed, "this has fallen upon me like a thunderclap! Only yesterday all was so bright with promise; and now to-day—ah! what shall I say to you? how can I comfort you?"

Miriam only sighed.

"Can you not weep, dear? I fear the shock will kill you. Let me hold you—so. Now tell me your grief. Can you not, my sister?"

"No! no! no!" moaned Miriam, and lay in the arms of her false friend as if thought or motion were torture.

At this juncture an attendant of the restaurant entered with glasses and a bottle on a salver, which he set on the table.

"See!" said Leoline, "I have ordered you some wine. It will strengthen you, dear, and help you to bear this trial. Here, drink this."

Before pouring the wine the actress had dropped a single drop of liquid from a small vial into the glass she now held to Miriam's lips. A terrible look had come into her face while doing this; and through her brain had flashed the thought:

"Ah! if it were but deadly poison!"

Miriam swallowed the draught with the docility of a child.

The drug wrought a change in the girl. Before she had suffered intensely without the power to give vent to her grief, save in moans and sighs. As the subtle poison was absorbed and carried to the brain a dull listlessness took possession of her.

As Leoline watched her victim for the operation of the drug she had administered, her own brain seemed on fire. The nearer the moment approached when she must speak words every one of which would scorch her tongue, the more heart and brain shrunk back with sickening repulsion. A score of times she essayed to begin, and as often the words died on her lips.

"Oh, God!" she cried, within her soul, "if hell hath keener anguish than this, I pity those that fall amid its terrors!"

Then with a mighty effort she began:

"Miriam, my sister, I have more to do than to comfort you. Your father and our best friend, M. de Calignay, have commissioned me to speak to you of your future. Can you listen?"

Miriam was silent. Leoline resumed:

"Do you realize that to-morrow you will be utterly alone in the world? We, your friends, will be left to you, to be sure; but you will have no one—absolutely no one who belongs to you. It is a terrible thing, my sister, for a young girl to be all alone in this cold, wicked world, and in poverty. I have my dear uncle; but you—ah! what would become of you left so desolate, so helpless!"

"Your father has thought of all this and wishes to make provision for your protection. You know that there is wealth that is yours by right. With that there would be some hope for you, for money will surround you with safeguards that are denied the poor. But you, a mere girl, cannot get it, nor could your friends get it for you. I do not understand the law; but it is so that you cannot get even your own, except through some one related to you who can



fight for it in the courts; and after your father, you know you have no one.

"There is, then, but one way open to you. If you were married, your husband could get this money for you."

Leoline stopped with a sudden convulsive choking. She was as pale as death; it seemed as if the earth were sinking beneath her; and yet by her strong will she preserved the compassionate expression of her face, and, after a brief struggle, commanded her voice.

"Remember, my child, that what I am about to propose is a scheme for your protection framed by your father with his last earthly energies, that when his hold is relaxed by death you may not be without a supporting arm. You know that his love would only plan that which was for your real welfare. He cannot die in peace feeling that you are left unprotected. To this end, it is his wish that you marry his and your best earthly friend—M. de Calignay!"

It was spoken! Strange lights danced before Leoline's eyes. There was a humming in her ears, and a pressure in her brain as if it would burst. Cold damps oozed from every pore of her body and stood in beads on her brow and around her bloodless lips.

As for Miriam, she started, and up through the dead lethargy that clogged all her faculties came the sharp protest:

"Oh! I cannot marry M. de Calignay! I do not love him—not in that way."

A shadowy vision of the pale, student-face of Dr. Meredith flitted before her mental view; but in her benumbed state it was too vague and transient to influence her.

"Understand," pursued Leoline, in a strained, monotonous voice, following the line she had marked out for herself in a mechanical way, "that it is not designed that you shall ever live with him as his wife. But he must have a legal claim to you, so that he can act in your behalf. When your fortune is secured, the marriage can be annulled, and you will be as free as you are to-day. This merely nominal bond will be in existence but a short time. In six months you may be released with an independent fortune at your command."

"Leo, how can you speak of all this when my father even now may be dying? I care nothing for the future. Let me go to him at once."

She made a faint effort to rise, but in her present state it required little to combat her will. Leoline's arm restrained her a moment, and with the moment the purpose passed. She sunk back limp and apathetic.

"Miriam, remember that it is your father's dying wish. It is the last thing he can do for you on earth. The minister has been summoned, and he, with M. de Calignay and your father, are waiting for your acquiescence."

"Oh, Leo!" cried the poor victim, plaintively. "It is all so terrible—it is all so strange! I never heard of such a thing before. You frighten me by speaking as if it were all arranged. Help me, Leo! I feel as if I were drifting away! Do not let me go!"

The feebleness with which she clung to her false friend was pathetic. Tears of weakness, which she could not have shed from grief, came into her eyes.

"Courage! courage!" whispered Leoline, rising and lifting her victim to her feet. "It will soon be over. It is but a word. You will never know any difference in your life. M. de Calignay, your husband only in name, will be to you only your uncle and my uncle, as he is now. And I shall be your sister. What have you to fear?"

"Leo! Leo!" gasped the girl, yet offering no further resistance, "do not ask me to do this. Spare me, Leo! Oh! save me!"

"What! could we, your friends, urge you to do what was not for your own good? Could your father?"

"Father?" repeated Miriam, as if forgetful of her parent's alleged agency in the matter.

"Yes. Do you realize that he is dying, and that by opposing him you will give him great unrest? How terrible would be the thought that he was passing away forever, and that you were blindly refusing the protection he would give—the last he can ever do for you! No, my sister; for his sake as well as for your own—for all our sakes, you must do as he wishes."

"Father! father! Oh! do not leave me! I will do as you wish!" sighed the girl.

"That is a dear, good girl," said Leoline. "See! I will make it easy for you. You shall go in with me. You must not talk much, nor show any repugnance to the marriage—remember it is only one in form—for your father is very weak, and the slightest excitement might kill him at once. If we can have every-

thing as he wishes it, and make him feel happy in your security we hope to keep him alive for two or three days. This is what you must do: take his hand and say: 'Father is it your wish that I marry M. de Calignay?' He will say that it is. You then say that you are willing to comply at once. Will you do this?"

"Yes. But, oh, Leo! I tremble with dread! You will not let go of my hand?"

"No, dear."

M. de Calignay was immediately informed, and came to escort the ladies into the presence of the dying gambler.

Miriam looked apprehensively at him and clung close to Leoline's side.

The Frenchman took her hand and said, in a gravely tender way:

"My poor child, you do not shrink from me? You do not doubt my enduring friendship?"

"No," replied Miriam, faintly.

"Leoline has told you all that your father has planned for your welfare?"

"Yes."

"And you are willing to accede and trust yourself to my protection?"

"Yes."

"I will never betray ze trust!" said M. de Calignay, solemnly, and bent forward and touched his lips to her forehead.

Leoline started with a gasp, and her face for an instant became convulsed with jealous hate.

A lightning glance flashed from M. de Calignay's eyes into hers.

"Come!" he said, and led them from the room.

Alas, poor Miriam! Was there none to succor?

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A STRANGE MARRIAGE.

BETWEEN the two plotters Miriam was led into the presence of her father, where the minister and two or three witnesses were in waiting. At sight of her parent a thrice of anguish for a moment penetrated the lethargic cloud that enveloped her energies.

Starting from her supporters, she glided to the bedside and bent over the dying gambler until her cheek rested against his, and her lips were at his ear.

"Oh, father!" she murmured, brokenly.

"My darling!" he returned; and for a moment both were silent, struggling with their emotions.

Presently he said:

"You have heard all?"

"Yes, father."

"And you are willing to comply?"

"Oh, father! you are sure that it is right? I have never thought of such a thing."

"My darling, why should it not be right? Who could love you or care for you more tenderly?"

"And you wish it, father?"

"Yes, my child. All your future depends upon it."

She was silent a moment. It was the last struggle of instinctive repulsion.

The man moved slightly with a sigh of pain. She started, gazed at him in a panic of apprehension, saw a pallor overspread his face, and cried, quickly:

"Father, I will do as you wish—at once!"

"You are ready?" asked M. de Calignay, coming up on one side, while Leoline drew near on the other and put her arm about the victim.

"Do not delay," said the Curate, faintly, "or I feel that I shall not live to see it consummated."

M. de Calignay nodded to the minister, who immediately took up his station at the other side of the bed.

Miriam clung trembling to her false friend, while the arch-plotter held her other hand.

The service began.

A ghastly pallor overspread Leoline's face, and she had to lean against the bed for support. Her eyes burned like fire, and her white lips were compressed and her teeth set to keep back the hysterical scream of terror and hatred that rose in her throat.

The air seemed full of dancing scintillations; the walls of the apartment seemed to recede into space; the words of the minister seemed to strike into her soul like the clang of an iron bell!

There was a sound of hurried, yet cautious steps in the hall. The door which had been left ajar was pushed open. Sammy appeared on the scene.

A look of anxious solicitude was on his face. He gazed from one to the other of the occupants of the room. It was a moment before he gathered the sense of the minister's words, which gave him the significance of the group at the bedside.

Then the pallor of sudden fright came over him. He advanced further into the room and seemed about to interrupt the ceremony with some exclamation, when Ezreth Quirk, Esq., glided to his side.

"Not a word!" he whispered, clutching Sammy's arm. "The defendant is balancing between life and death where the least excitement will put him out like a snuffed candle!"

Thus checked, Sammy remained mute, gazing at Miriam and her scheming foes as if fascinated.

But there was another unexpected witness.

The spirit of unrest had taken possession of Dr. Meredith. Hurrying through his most urgent calls, he returned to be near the woman whom fate had indissolubly linked to him.

A glance told him all. It was like a stroke of lightning. He stood rooted on the threshold.

He had experienced a sense of relief at the possibility that fate would take the problem out of his hands. This unexpected consummation left him breathless.

M. de Calignay, without turning round, felt the influence of his rival's vicinity; and when the minister came to the solemn charge: "If any one know ought why these two should not be joined together, let him now speak or forever after hold his peace!" his very heart stood still with an almost superstitious dread.

If Miriam felt the eyes that rested upon her in a dumb despair, she gave no sign.

So the iniquity progressed to the end.

"Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!"

It was done!

M. de Calignay was calm. His triumph was assured.

Leoline felt as if the world were falling away beneath her feet.

Miriam scarcely realized that any change had taken place.

Dr. Meredith at that moment tasted the bitterness of death!

Over Sammy a chill and pallid hush rested. No one knew his thoughts.

The Curate alone smiled.

"Now, my darling, I shall die at peace," he said.

He made an effort and raised his arms, while his eyes wooed her to his embrace.

With a murmuring cry she sunk into it, clasping him close and kissing his lips.

A convulsive shiver, followed by a relaxation of all the muscles, and the man lay motionless.

The girl started back, gazed an instant into the face on which was frozen the smile of death, then turned round and looked with scared, appealing eyes into the faces of those around her, reeled and sunk into M. de Calignay's arms.

A terrible light leaped into Leoline's eyes. The cry of her soul was:

"Oh! if she be but dead!"

A lightning glance from M. de Calignay recalled her to herself, and she flew to Miriam's assistance.

Dr. Meredith went to the bedside, placed his hand over the man's heart and his ear to his lips, then, without a word, drew the sheet over the dead face.

"Friends," said the minister, solemnly, "we stand in the presence of the Great Mystery!"

Raising his hands as in invocation, he continued:

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away! Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

A room with the light turned low. On the bed the form of a young girl lying like one dead—so white, so motionless!

In the middle of the room a man and a woman standing face to face, gazing into one another's eyes. On her face a look of agonized questioning, as if the fiends of doubt were carrying the citadel of her soul by assault in spite of her desperate resistance; on his a look which says:

"Scrutinize narrowly! What do you see to question? Well, are you satisfied?"—the last indicated by a slight touch of impatience.

Outside the room a youth with his face in his hands, leaning motionless against the wall. He is a picture of desolation.

Another room, lighted only by the moonlight.

A bed, and lying across it on his face a man who has removed none of his clothes.

The moon sets, leaving the room in utter darkness. The glimmers of dawn enter, grow bolder and bolder, until the full blaze of the sun lies across that motionless figure.

A young man with the form of an athlete now stretched on a bed of weakness and pain.



Gaping wounds have drained his veins of the blood wont to leap strong and free along their course. He dreams of an angel that lays her cool hand on his brow and breathes sad music into his ear, and wakes to find himself alone with a recollection and a regret!

Ah! what a strange thing is this life that we blindly stumble through!

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A PEEP INTO A CONSERVATORY.

THE Curate was dead and buried. His name and the tragic events that preceded his death lapsed into recollections to be recited for the beguilement of an hour.

The name of the victorious duelist did not transpire, since Bowie was a stranger to all the witnesses of the affray.

Dr. Meredith took up his line of life again, making no sign. Perhaps the student pallor was a little more marked, the lines on the intellectual brow a little deeper, and a far-away expression added to the thoughtful eyes. But that was all.

And Miriam? Ah! she was but the shadow of her former self.

Day after day she lay in a dull apathy. Almost her only emotion, besides the dreary desolation of despair that had fallen upon her, was gratitude to Leoline for her unremitted care and kindness.

The jealousy of the actress had developed into a monomania. She slept in the same room with Miriam, and never left her side except when called away by the duties growing out of her profession. Then she insisted upon M. de Calignay accompanying her.

The arch-plotter had rented a flat and furnished it in a style in marked contrast with what Miriam had been used to nearly all her life. Caring nothing for his wife, it did not irk him that he never saw her except in Leoline's presence. So the conditions of the strange contract on which this marriage was based were kept up.

A great change had come upon Sammy. It seemed as if all the boyishness had suddenly been expressed from his nature. His exuberant spirits gave place to a rather sad thoughtfulness. He did not change his course of life materially; but he ceased to affect extravagance of dress and dropped the bantering exaggeration from his ordinary speech. He read Shakespeare a great deal, seeming to prefer the tragedies, as more in keeping with his altered frame of mind.

Ezreth Quirk, Esq., was in his element! In the full glow of his new (second-hand) clothes he entered his home with a pompous stride. Placing his left hand under the skirts of his new (second-hand) coat and doffing his new (second-hand) hat with a majestic wave, he cried:

"May it please the court!"—with a grand salaam to his astonished wife—"and gentlemen of the jury!"—treating his startled children to a like obeisance—"behold a man whose star is in the ascendant! The clouds of adversity roll back their murky folds, and the sun of prosperity scales the resplendent sky!"

"Ezreth Quirk," demanded his wife, breathlessly, "where in the world did you make that raise?"

"Madam," cried Quirk, loftily, "my ships have come to town!"

"Then I'm goin' to have that painted horse!" cried a juvenile Quirk, confidently.

"An' I'm goin' to have lots o' candy!" lisped a second.

"Pugh! Just wait till ye see my real gun! I'm goin' to have a real gun that'll shoot; ain't I, father?" exclaimed a third.

"Gentlemen of the—" That is to say, my hopeful progeny, there's no telling what we won't have—

"Ezreth Quirk!" interrupted his more steady-going wife, "you'd better not branch out so big until you're sure that the bottom won't all fall out of your grand prospects."

Notwithstanding this caustic rebuff, Ezreth Quirk, Esq., was, as we have said, in his element. In his new (second-hand) clothes he presented a respectable appearance. And to have seen the anxious expression of countenance with which he, green bag under arm, hastened to and from the various courts of law, one would have thought him the busiest advocate at the bar.

However, this was not altogether a fraud. In fact, it had more foundation in reality than almost any other act of his life. He actually had one case of importance.

M. de Calignay's motto was: "If it must be done, it were better that it be done quickly." He immediately set matters in trim for the ac-

quirement of Miriam's inheritance. His purpose was to convert it into personal property, in the shape of stocks and bonds, as soon as she came into possession.

*The rest remained with Leoline!*

And Miriam, knowing nothing of law or of business responsibilities, and never dreaming of distrusting those whose watchful tenderness left her not a care that anxious solicitude could remove, listened with her hands over her eyes while Ezreth Quirk, Esq., in his most magniloquent style, read documents not a word of which she understood, conscious only of a weary succession of provisos and wherases and aforesaid that obtruded upon her grief, and when they pointed out the place for her signature, she affixed it as if it were a painful task, best performed when soonest over.

For a time this accorded with M. de Calignay's purposes. One day he said:

"Leoline, why does ze girl lie so dead to everything going on around her? To her age such grief is not natural."

A suspicious glance flashed in the actress's eye.

"So long as you get her money, what difference does it make to you how she appears?"

"Zere! don't get jealous. Personally I wouldn't care if she looked like a mummy or a living skeleton. But when we come to sell zis property, it would be better zat to outsiders she appeared to be enjoying average good health. Can you note cheer her up a bit? A trip to ze country, or somet'ing?"

"I can discontinue administering this," said Leoline, quietly, taking a small bottle from her chateleine.

"What! Have you been drugging her already?" cried the Frenchman.

An evil smile lighted Leoline's face. She said:

"You wanted her docile—I have made her so!"

"And it has answered admirably. Ze property will be ours in two weeks. But now give her a respite. When we have ze million firmly in our gripe you can renew your treatment!"

In pursuance of this policy the drug was discontinued, and the natural buoyancy of youth exerted itself at once. Though sad and abstracted, Miriam began to shake off the lethargy that had bound her so long.

But now arose a strange antagonism in her mind. All along she had ascribed her prostration to grief for her father, until she had come to look upon it as a proper state, and to forecast all her future life clouded by regrets, a return to the warmth and beauty of life appearing to her as a disloyalty to his memory. But now she found herself recovering against her will, as it were.

With this feeling she struggled against the awakening interest in life, and to this end persistently refused to leave the room whose walls for weeks had circumscribed her little world.

No sister could have been kinder than Leoline, no courtier more deferential to his queen than was M. de Calignay to Miriam. Still he brought her papers to sign with the purport of which she did not trouble herself.

One day, while reclining near a window, the blinds being carefully drawn to exclude even a view of the outer world, through the interstices the odor of flowers was borne to her on the soft tropical breeze.

Instantly an intense longing to see something green actually growing seized upon her. It came with overpowering force, so that she arose to her feet to seek its gratification.

She knew that there was a small conservatory the extreme rear of the suite of rooms that comprised the flat in which she lived. But thus far she had never visited it.

Noiselessly she glided from one apartment to another, until she came to a reception-room which was divided from the conservatory by a curtain which hung before an archway.

The curtain was partly drawn aside. She could see into the conservatory. What she saw caused her to stop dead still and stare in amazement.

And this was the spectacle that made Miriam's blood flow back upon her heart:

Leoline was seated on M. de Calignay's lap, with his cheeks between her palms, kissing his lips rapturously!

No woman could mistake the look of exultant passion on the actress's face. Miriam knew that Leoline's love for M. de Calignay was inconsistent with the relationship of uncle and niece, which she supposed to subsist between them.

This impressed her even before she recalled the fact that M. de Calignay was her husband and Leoline her professed friend. This last thought brought no jealousy, only the question;

could Leoline be deceiving her throughout?

She was not long in receiving an answer. Her name was on Leoline's lips. She listened.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### "IF I COULD ONLY ESCAPE!"

MIRIAM'S heritage had been gained and converted into securities that could be carried in one's pocket—and all without her knowledge, though she had signed wherever her signature was required.

When all was settled M. de Calignay came home to Leoline, to tell her that the period of her probation now rested in her own hands.

She saw him enter and pass into the conservatory, whither he beckoned her to follow. She knew by his look that the crisis was come.

With her heart in her mouth she glided into Miriam's room. The invalid was reclining with closed eyes, apparently dozing.

Leoline withdrew, closing the door softly, then sped like a spirit to the man who held the light and perfume of her life.

"Oh! I am wild with ecstasy! I know what is coming!" was her salutation, as she threw her arms about his neck. "Raoul, wait! Do not tell me yet!"

She was like a child that puts its sweetmeats at arm's-length, to enjoy the delight of feeling that it has but to stretch forth its hand.

"Let me tell you," she said, presently.

"Well?" assented M. de Calignay.

"You secured this patrimony."

"Yes."

"Disposed of it to advantage, considering the hurried sale, realizing a trifle over a million dollars."

"Exactly—if you call a hundred thousand dollars, or zereabouts, a trifle."

"Ha! ha! ha! A trifle to us, now, is it not?"

"Or will be, when we are secure in our million."

"How painfully exact you are!" cried Leoline, gayly. "But I will come to that presently. Among the lawyer's fees—what cormorants they are!—is ten thousand dollars for Ezreth Quirk."

"Ha! ha! ha! You would laugh to see him! He t'inks zere is no end to ten t'ousand dollars. And his wife is as bad. Before she was prudent almost to miserliness; but ze ten t'ousand has completely turned her head. She t'inks zey are now independently rich, and has rented a flat in a fashionable quarter. Her toilets are simply marvelous, and you would t'ink ze children tricked out for a puppet-show. Quirk himself has bloomed into a dandy, not very remarkable, however, for personal cleanliness. Zey are actually talking of keeping a carriage and pair. Zis time next year zey will be back in Court House Place, mark my word!"

"Very well. I am content. But we have a more interesting topic of conversation. All our plans have succeeded. Only this whining hypochondriac now stands between us and a million dollars—more than that—happiness!"

"Well? What disposition is to be made of her?"

The actress's face grew dark.

"Raoul, that is my part!"

"Have you formed a plan?"

"What! for my revenge? Do you think I have seen her day after day in my place without forming plans to thrust her out? Raoul, I have thought of it by day and dreamed of it at night, until I have hit upon a way."

"How?"

"I might thrust a knife into her heart!"

M. de Calignay ran his thumb up beside his left ear, with that peculiar motion which suggests the probable penalty for murder.

Leoline smiled.

"Only masculine fools do that way—oh?" she asked.

"In ze second case?" suggested M. de Calignay.

"I might poison her food or drink!"

"Which is also attended with some slight risk, growing out of post-mortem examinations." "Consequently only female fools adopt that course."

"What zen is open to you, being wise?"

"She shall die a natural death!"

"Of old age?" with a shrug.

"While I too grow old? Never! We shall not be three months older before the only remaining impediment between us will be that conventionality which requires a widower to wait a year before giving his first wife a successor!"

"All of which is to be brought about?"

"Leave it to me!—leave it to me! To accomplish it we must move into the country."



"You have the means now to take a villa for the summer."

"If you think that her health demands it," said M. de Calignay, with a laugh.

"My hatred demands it!" said Leoline, fiercely. "Ah! Raoul, you can never know what I have suffered. But now I shall have you all to myself! Raoul! Raoul! it makes me dizzy with delight!"

It was at this point that Miriam found her way into the reception-room, only divided from the conservatory by a partly-drawn curtain through which she could see.

"Raoul, do you know what Miriam—ah! how I detest the name!—do you know what it means?" asked Leoline, and Miriam heard her.

"Ze significance of names is a branch of lore—" began M. de Calignay, when Leoline interrupted him.

"Do not chaff, Raoul. It means bitterness. Ah! she has been gall and wormwood to me! I have forced myself to kiss her when I would as lief have kissed a reptile. I have clasped her in my arms when mere contact with her has made me sick. And I have been racked by jealousy! If you had ever offered her a caress, I believe I should have flown at her and torn her with my nails. Even this formal tie between you has been worse than a living death to me. I have had the strangest fears! I have thought that if I should die before she did, this would stand between you and me forever and forever!"

"Raoul, if this money could have been got in any other way than by marrying that simple fool, I would have given my right hand before she should ever have been anything to you! As it is, for myself alone I would rather go without the money than again pass through so terrible an ordeal."

"But when she is laid away in a marble vault, as becomes ze heiress of a million," said M. Calignay, "I fancy ze money will not go amiss, even for you."

"Raoul, when she is removed from our path, we will go thousands and thousands of miles away from this hateful spot, will we not? Let us go to Paris."

"Leoline," said the Frenchman, gazing at her with glowing admiration, "with what a million would buy, you could have ze gay capital at your feet!"

"Raoul, shall we go?—shall we go?" cried the actress, delightedly.

"As you will. Your will shall be my law, when ze incumbrance in yonder falls from my shoulders."

Miriam waited to hear no more. With tottering steps she made her way back to her chamber.

"He married me for my money, and they are now waiting for me to die, that they may consummate their love!" she thought, sick with horror. "They loved each other from the first, and have deceived me by every word, look and gesture. Oh! father! father! father!"

It never occurred to her that the relationship which they had announced to the world was a part of the plot, designed to protect their association from the censorship of society. And this kinship invested their crime with such shocking repulsiveness that she could not endure the thought of meeting them again.

"Oh! if I could only get away!" she reflected. "I cannot bear ever to touch her again!—I cannot bear to see her! But where and how can I go? They are the only friends I have known."

She thought of Dr. Meredith and James Bowie. She felt that either of them would help her. But she knew not where to find them. Then came the cry:

"Oh! if Sammy were only here!"

As if in response, Sammy appeared at the door.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### HER LAST FRIEND GONE.

THERE was a sad, wistful expression in Sammy's eyes as he looked at Miriam. Since that day when her marriage with M. de Calignay had burst upon him like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, he had always looked at her thus. If he had loved her with more than a boyish affection, he had never given it expression. He had never asked an explanation of that strange marriage, nor referred to it in any way, and, absorbed in herself, Miriam had never thought that there was anything to explain. Apart from the influence of the cloud which shadowed her whole life, her manner toward him at their unfrequent meetings had been just as of old.

Now, however, she ran to him and seized his arm excitedly.

"Oh, Sammy!" she cried. "you must have

come in answer to my prayer! You are the only friend I have in the world!"

"Why, Miriam! what is the matter?" asked the youth, in bewilderment.

"Hush! Do not speak so loud. They will hear you."

"Who?"

"M. de Calignay and Leo! Come! let us fly from here! Oh, Sammy! I cannot see them again. Take me somewhere, anywhere, where they will never come!"

"But, Miriam, surely you do not wish to leave the house?"

For she was pulling him toward the door.

"Yes! yes! Do not oppose me," cried the girl. "I cannot explain to you now; but I will tell you all, as soon as we get away. Oh, Sammy! I have been so terribly deceived!—so outraged!"

"But your—" Sammy choked over the word *husband*, and substituted—"M. de Calignay? Does he know that you are going? And where is Leo?"

"Do not speak of them. It is they that I am fleeing from. Oh, Sammy! come without explanation, or it will be too late."

The youth was so bewildered that he scarcely knew what to do. He had always supposed that M. de Calignay and Leoline were Miriam's and his best friends. He could not realize all at once that Miriam was holding them up in the light of enemies, to be feared and fled from.

But one thing was apparent: she was determined to leave the house without delay.

"Where are your hat and mantilla?" he asked; "for as a rule ladies do not rush into the street bareheaded, except on the stage."

"Never mind them! Come! come! I hear them coming! Oh! we are discovered!"

It was true. At this moment M. de Calignay and Leoline appeared on the scene.

Miriam's agitation was so marked as to attract immediate attention.

"Do not let them touch me! I am afraid of them! They have deceived me terribly!" she cried, shrinking behind her true friend.

"We have been overheard! She has discovered everything!" whispered Leoline, in lightning articulations behind her hand, and covered the communication with a cough.

"Grand Dieu! I will crush them both!" responded M. de Calignay, behind his mustache, white fury appearing in his face.

He advanced a stride with clenched hands, as if about to put his desperate threat into instant execution.

Leoline was more cunning than he. She restrained him with a hand on his arm.

Into her face came a look of deep compassion, and her eyes suffused with tears. Her voice was tremulous with emotion as she turned to M. de Calignay and spoke just loud enough for Sammy to hear:

"Raoul, it is what the doctor warned us to fear! Poor dear! what a terrible affliction!"

With outstretched hands and pleading eyes she advanced across the room, saying:

"Miriam, darling, see!—it is I, Leoline, your sister."

"No! no!" cried Miriam, "you are my worst enemy! Oh! Leo, how could you be so cruel—so wicked?"

The actress crossed her arms over her breast and raised her tearful eyes, as if appealing to heaven. You would have thought her a saint!

"Oh! my poor darling! What are you saying? I have only love and pity for you."

"I heard you say that you hated me, there in the conservatory."

Leoline sighed and turned to M. de Calignay.

"Raoul, see if you cannot have influence with her."

The Frenchman was not slow to take the clever cue given him by the actress.

"Miriam," he said, gently, "fear nothing. I am with you."

And he in turn advanced.

"Oh! Sammy! Sammy!" cried the girl, wildly, "do not let him come near me! Oh! save me from him!"

"Miriam, do you not know me? I am your husband. Do you fear me?"

"It was only to get the money, Sammy—he said so. He married me for my money. And now they are waiting for me to die!"

Leoline was wringing her hands in seeming distress.

"You try to reason with her, Sammy; she is not afraid of you," she said. "Try to get her to lie down again."

Sammy's mind had received the impression Leoline intended.

"There! it is all right," he said, coaxingly, putting his arm about the sobbing girl. "Won't you go back to your room? I will go with you,

and read that passage in Lear you like best. Come!"

He tried to draw her gently toward her room, but she strove to break away from him.

"Oh, Sammy!" she cried, "what makes you look and speak so strangely? Don't you believe me? I tell you they have deceived me all along. Only—"

"Miriam, you are breaking my heart!" sighed Leoline.

"God's mercy! Ze hand of chastisement is laid heavily upon us!" aspirated M. de Calignay.

"Come! we will all be kind to you," coaxed Sammy.

"Oh, Sammy! They are trying to make you think that I am crazy! Do you believe them? Oh, you know that I am not? Sammy, I am so afraid! Take me away from them at once."

"It is all right," assured the youth, still trying to draw her toward the room.

She saw M. de Calignay again advancing. Leoline, too, with her hypocritical tears.

Between her two cunning enemies and her one bewildered friend she was sore beset. Suddenly breaking from Sammy, she darted toward the door.

But M. de Calignay intercepted her flight. She had torn the door open when his hand fell upon her shoulder.

She struggled fiercely.

His arm closed about her.

With a shriek, she fainted from terror.

There was a troubled look on M. de Calignay's face as he bore her past Sammy into her room.

"Stay here, Sammy; and if any one comes to see the cause of the poor child's shriek, tell them that the shock has worked its worst effect in a fit of delirium," said Leoline, clasping her hands while tears rained from her eyes. "Oh, my friend, we are all in great trouble. We were hoping that she was getting better, and now this has befallen."

"Go to her at once," said the youth. "I will meet all curious inquiries."

Sammy went into the corridor to meet several tenants of the house who had been startled by the cry. They expressed their sympathy, and stood in a group gossiping when he left them.

Meanwhile the plotters were alone with their unconscious victim.

"A most unfortunate *contretemps*!" said M. de Calignay, scowling.

"On the contrary," cried Leoline, radiant, "it furnishes us with just the excuse for taking her into the country. Ah! you little reptile, I will have my revenge out of you!"

And she shook her fist in Miriam's unconscious face.

Leaving Miriam to Leoline, who put her under the influence of narcotics, M. de Calignay sought Mr. Gross, the house-agent, and negotiated for a secluded villa. Mr. Gross had just the thing, a house all furnished, the owners intending to spend the summer in the North.

The next day Miriam was whirled in a close carriage to the home whence her enemies intended she should never return.

It was midnight!

M. de Calignay and Leoline stood just without Miriam's door.

"Now for the first step in my revenge!" muttered the actress.

She turned the knob and they entered.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### A HELLISH DEED!

THE appointments of the room entered by the plotters showed it to be a young lady's bed-chamber. Everything in and about the room was stamped with elegance.

The carpet, like a bank of moss—the marble-top dressing bureau, with its glass reaching nearly to the ceiling—the elegant curtains draping windows open to the floor—the low French bedstead, with exquisitely-carved and polished head-board—everything seemed to say that the tenant of so fair an abode must be happy indeed.

But among the downy pillows, covered by a silken counterpane, lay the form of a girl whose wretchedness, even in sleep, must have brought a tear to the eye and a pang to the heart.

Ah! she was wan and woe-begone! The tear yet hung on her lashes, and the pale lips had a piteous curve, as if a sob had been perpetuated in material form.

"Ze drug holds her senses enchained," said M. de Calignay. "Now, what shall we do?"

Leoline paused at the bedside to gloat over her helpless rival.

"Only that babyish thing stands in our path."



she muttered. "See how easily I will push her aside."

"How?" asked M. de Calignay.

Leoline turned toward him.

"She is very delicate," she observed.

"Yes. Well?"

"Suppose she were to take a severe cold?"

"A thing very easily cured."

"Yes, if the proper measures are taken."

"If nothing is done, nature will bring relief a little more tardily."

"True. But suppose before she is well of one cold she takes another—and still another—a fourth—a fifth—and so on?"

"It would be a serious matter, assuredly."

"In medical parlance, what would be the result?"

"Consumption, no doubt."

"Exactly."

"But all this is not likely to occur."

"By chance, no—through our instrumentality, yes?"

"Ah!"

The Frenchman's eyes contracted. He was catching the drift of the woman's words.

"Raoul," pursued the actress, "if she were to die of consumption the world would say that her grief had much to do with it."

"Zat will serve us much better than to ascribe her death to ze administration of certain poisons, assuredly."

"I flatter myself that I could never be guilty of anything so clumsy as that!"

"And now will you take me into your confidence? What do you propose?"

The actress walked to the French window and opened it. The veranda and lawn lay beyond, the latter mottled with fitful moonlight and shadow.

"Lift her in your arms," said Leoline.

"What?" asked the Frenchman, puzzled.

"I wish you to fetch her out here."

M. de Calignay was about to comply, when he was interrupted.

"No need to wrap her in the coverlet. Quite the reverse is our policy. Fetch her as she is, in her night-dress only."

"Ah!"

M. de Calignay was quick to take the cue, and Miriam, in the scant habiliments of slumber, was lifted from her bed and borne out of the chamber into the damp and chill night-air.

"Place her in that hammock. Ah! it galls me to see her in your arms, even carrying her to her death!" said the actress, impatiently.

A crimson silken hammock was swung between the wall of the building and a post of the veranda. Into it M. de Calignay deposited his unconscious burden.

"She will get her death of cold, coming from ze warm bed into ze damp night-air."

"That is what we want, is it not?"

"True."

"Have I not planned a sweet revenge? I shall see her wasting away day by day."

"Meanwhile, must we wait here without amusement?"

"It is amusement enough for me to see in imagination the gold drawing nearer and nearer to us, bringing with it the day of our happiness."

"Ha! ha! ha! Zat is certainly as entertaining as a spectacular drama."

Leoline felt of Miriam's face. It was cold and damp. Next putting her hand beneath the thin linen robes, she felt that the skin of her victim presented that roughness to the touch which our nurses have taught us to call "goose-flesh."

"She has been out here long enough. Carry her back to bed," said Leoline. "If she is not nearly dead with congested lungs in the morning, I shall miss my calculations greatly."

M. de Calignay bore the unhappy girl back to bed.

"Let the bedclothes appear to have slipped off during the night," said Leoline, adjusting the coverlets in keeping with her words. "And leave the window open, as if it had been insecurely fastened."

"Leoline, you forget nothing," said M. de Calignay, admiringly.

"I have had weeks as long as years in which to lay my plans accurately," replied the actress. "Come; we can now leave her to herself."

In the morning Miriam showed the effects of her wanton exposure. She could not speak above a whisper, and she was distressed by a painful cough. Her head ached, and every muscle in her body seemed a separate torture.

Leoline was all tenderness and commiseration. She administered the most approved remedies, and brought fruit and delicacies of cookery to tempt the invalid's appetite. On the little stand near Miriam's easy-chair she placed a bouquet of rare flowers.

Miriam still shrunk from Leoline with unabated antipathy and fear; but she was forced to accept her kind attentions. She was passionately fond of flowers, and frequently held the bouquet to inhale its fragrance.

But the perfume of the flowers disguised another odor of which she took no cognizance, though it soon began to have an influence on her physical organism. The poison she was inhaling was ether.

It made her feel very strangely, and soon began to play tricks with her imagination. Something seemed the matter with the carpet, and upon looking more closely she saw that it was swarming with black ants.

Not a little startled she drew up her feet and stood in her chair.

Leoline hastened to her side.

"What is it, dear? What has frightened you?" she asked, in the tenderest voice conceivable.

"Oh! the ants! See! see! where did they come from?"

"Ants? Why, there are no ants."

"Yes! yes! See! the floor is alive with them! They will get on you!"

A look of pity came into Leoline's face, and a tear started to her eye.

"There!" she said, soothingly. "Don't think any more about them. See! they are all gone now—are they not?"

"No! no! Do you not see them? Ah! they are crawling on your dress!—they are on your hand! Oh! do not touch me! Oh, mercy! there are some on my neck! Brush them off! brush them off! Oh! oh! oh!"

In response to her hoarse screams M. de Calignay and the servants came rushing into the room.

Leoline was in secret delight, though she appeared at her wits' end with dismay.

"She thinks there are ants on her. Try to convince her that it is only imagination."

A servant—an old aunty whose honesty could not be questioned—went up to Miriam with tears in her kindly old eyes.

"Fo' de Lo'd, missy!" she said, "dey hain't no ants in dis bressed house. Take de word ob you' ole auntie, honey, an' don't t'ink no mo' 'bout it. Put you' head on dis hyea' bosom, an' pray de Lo'd to drike de debil an' all he' imps into de pit ob eberlastin' darkness. It's all right, honey. Dey won't nuffin' hurt you when ole auntie's 'roun'. Dah!—dah!—it's all right now; hain't it?"

Miriam submitted to be taken into the old aunty's arms, and with her face hidden in the ample bosom she became perfectly still. While the old negress began to rock gently back and forth and to croon a soothing sort of lullaby, Miriam was thinking.

A strange and terrible experience had come to her. She stood face to face with the awful question:

"AM I SANE?"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### DRIFTING TO DEATH.

MIRIAM now found herself in a terrible dilemma. She recalled the unvarying kindness of Leoline and M. de Calignay to her. Then she considered the deep grief into which she had been plunged by the death of her father. And here she was misled into overestimating the effect of that grief, because she confounded with it the half-stupor in which she had been held by the drug of which she had no suspicion.

She had heard of people becoming insane with grief. Suppose trouble had unsettled her reason?

Of one thing she felt assured, and the conviction turned her sick with terror: the ants must be purely imaginary! Her own reason told her that if they were real, far from trying to deceive her, Leoline and the female servants would be as much afraid of them as she.

If her senses deceived her once, could she rely upon them at all? Was not the scene in the conservatory a figment of a disordered brain?

She lay perfectly still in the old aunty's arms for perhaps fifteen minutes, trying to calm her brain and get her faculties well in hand. When she looked up everything was as usual—no ants were visible!

The solution of this was that the effects of the drug had passed off. Meanwhile, Leoline, who never overlooked a move in her game, had placed another bouquet in the place of the one which had been tampered with.

But Miriam knew nothing of this.

"Put me to bed, please," she said, wearily, to the old aunty; and she lay with her face to the wall.

"Well?" asked Leoline, with suppressed tri-

umph, when she stood alone with M. de Calignay.

"You are a genius!" cried the Frenchman, in delight. "A woman like you is a fortune in herself."

"Raoul, it is for love of you!" replied the actress; and genuine tears of deep emotion came into her eyes as she stood before him gazing up into his face.

He drew her upon his breast and fervently kissed brow and eyelids, cheek and lips.

With a sigh she yielded herself to his embrace, nestling close in his arms.

This woman whom pity could not move was like wax in the hands of the man she loved.

After this Miriam grew worse and worse. She became wan and thin. Every draught seemed to give her cold. Yet no precaution was neglected. Leoline watched her incessantly. In fact, so unremitted was her care that her own health suffered.

The doctor declared Miriam in quick consumption, and her symptoms certainly seemed to justify it. He had been selected by M. de Calignay and molded so that he unconsciously played into the hands of the arch-plotter! M. de Calignay's policy was never to take any one into his confidence when he could accomplish the desired result by warping their judgments, and making them serve him unawares.

Miriam was occasionally tormented by seeing the ants. After the first time, however, she shut her eyes and said nothing.

The consciousness of her own infirmity, as she supposed it to be, was sufficiently distressing to her. She could not bear to let others see it.

It preyed upon her mind with constantly augmenting force, until in connection with Leoline's unflagging tenderness and distress at being doubted, it unsettled her faith in the testimony of her eyes and ears when she had seemed to witness Leoline's perfidy.

So she found herself lapsing into hopeless despondency. She felt that her life was slipping away from her; but it had lost its attractions, and she experienced scarcely a regret. At least death would bring rest; and she felt weary—oh, so weary! And then, too, she would be reunited with her father.

Day by day she was sinking, all unresisting into the grave. The schemes of her false friends bade fair to be crowned with perfect success.

But there came an interruption. The best-laid plan may have a weak place. Leoline's had one. She overlooked a single fact!

Miriam's system gradually became inured to the drugs with which she was constantly plied. One night she had a dream. She thought she was a child again, in the Northern home, which, in her waking moments, she could scarcely remember. In fancy she stood in the bleak winter wind, shivering and crying for some one to open the door and admit her to the warm kitchen fire.

She awoke with a severe cold!

After an interval of a few days she once more dreamed. This time she retained her identity as a woman grown. She felt that she was floating, thinly clad, high in the air which was icy cold.

Again she awoke with renewed cold!

Again she was floating in the air. But now there seemed to be people about her, who moved as she moved. She tried to speak to them, to beg them to put something about her to protect her from the cold. But her tongue lay heavy, and she experienced the sensations of one in a nightmare.

As before the morning found her with painfully-congested lungs.

All this set her to thinking. What was the meaning of these coincidences? Here was a physical effect. It must have a physical cause. Mere imagination could not give her cold. Were not the dreams and the colds effects of a common cause? If so, what was the cause?

She thought until her head ached, and she was forced to abandon the subject.

A few nights later, after she had taken her medicine and been left for the night, she felt a dullness creeping over her. It now occurred to her that the same sensations had preceded her previous dreams.

"I shall have another nightmare to-night," she thought. "Oh, how I dread it!"

To avoid it she strove to keep awake; but an irresistible lethargy seemed to crush her will.

She arose from the bed, and donning a wrapper began to pace the room; but her very feet seemed weighted.

She opened the window and took long draughts of fresh air. She bathed her face in cold water. She inhaled ammonia.

In this way she fought off for a time the in-



clination to sleep. But ere long her feeble strength became exhausted, and she was forced to lie down, when she almost immediately sunk into what resembled sleep.

But the exercise she had taken, and especially inhaling deeply the pure air, had in a measure dissipated the narcotic. That night her dream came to her in a new form.

When she lay down she found that it was not natural sleep that was creeping over her faculties. On the contrary, her resistance to the lethargy had excited her; and now she found the power of voluntary motion passing from her, while the mind retained its waking activity. While she was conscious of her surroundings, she could not move hand or foot—she could not even lift her eyelids.

How long a time passed she knew not. But she heard the door open, and two persons entered the room and came to her bedside.

Next she heard M. de Calignay's voice.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

AND this is what M. de Calignay said:

"Our work is progressing finely. Do you mark the fever in her cheek?—and yet she is wasting to a shadow. Her constitution is one of iron for so delicate a frame, else she would have been in her grave before this."

"I am glad that it is so, Raoul," replied Leoline, in a voice so hard and different from its wont that Miriam would scarcely have recognized it, had she not known who was speaking. "It has prolonged my revenge. Ah! how I have gloated over her wretchedness! It is the penalty I am exacting from her for keeping me from your arms, Raoul. What she has suffered in body I have suffered in mind. Do you not see that I too am pale and wasted?"

"The world will say zat in your watchful care of her you deprived yourself of necessary sleep."

"Ha! ha! Just as she and the servants regarded her visions of ants as indication of aberration of mind. Raoul, she has never been the same since she began to doubt her own sanity. I believe she actually wavers in her belief in what she saw and heard in the conservatory."

"Ha! ha! ha! A clever trick, *ma belle!* Zat was a master-stroke. You conquered all resistance at ze fountain-head. No danger of her trying to run away from us now. She thinks us her best and only friends. Ha! ha! ha!"

"The little reptile!—how I hate her!" cried Leoline, spitefully. "Why does she cling so to life? I believe it is only to keep me the longer out of my happiness. Anybody but she would have succumbed long ago. Come! let us delay no longer. What tender care she receives at our hands to be sure! Fetch my patient out for her airing."

She went to the window and opened it.

Miriam felt the bedclothes drawn from over her—felt herself lifted in M. de Calignay's arms! His wife, and yet not his wife, she was overwhelmed with shame and terror at this violation of her privacy, as she would have been at the intrusion of any stranger.

She strove to struggle free from his arms, to scream out nature's instinctive protest. She could not move a muscle!—she could not produce a sound!

More helpless than a child, he bore her out and laid her in the hammock. She was conscious of everything—she could resist nothing!

The day had been sultry with midsummer heat; yet, taken from her bed in thin night-drapery, the damp night air seemed to strike an icy chill to her vitals.

She knew it all then. *They were murdering her!*—and all for the money which had been a curse to her ever since she could remember. When she was dead they would enjoy it. She shuddered, mentally, at the thought of their enjoying it all stained with her blood. What if this exposure should kill her? The fact of being murdered added an awful horror to the natural shrinking from death. Her father had been murdered. How terrible that his daughter, too, should be thrust out of the world, unbidden by her God!

As she thought of it, her mind revolted in strong rebellion. It was not personal anger toward her enemies, so much as the indignant resistance of an outraged soul. They had no right to rob her of life! She prayed that she might not die, that she might have strength to defeat them. She resolved to fight, not for her political right to the money for which they were killing her, but for the natural right to life—*simply life!*

They bore her back to bed, and by and by exhausted nature yielded, and she sunk into unconsciousness.

On the morrow Leoline's solicitude was re-

newed. Her perfidy turned Miriam sick; but she strove to repress all outward manifestation of her disgust. She lay scheming to counteract their plots.

From past experience she knew that she would not be subjected to exposure again for five or six days at least. Meanwhile she must recuperate her strength.

In her contemplated flight she would need food and wine to sustain her. From each meal she began to secrete crackers, which would keep better than bread. Wine she always had at hand.

She had a terrible ordeal before her. She must make her way to New Orleans, and there elude pursuit.

It would be useless to appeal to strangers for protection. They would believe her insane, and give her back to her enemies. It would be so easy to prove by the servants that she had wandered in her mind. Her story of midnight exposure would be so at variance with the well-known kindness of both Leoline and M. de Calignay that it would be set down as a vagary.

Sammay was her only friend, and his inability to cope with the cunning of her enemies had been proved.

In this strait she thought of James Bowie. Why, she knew not, but intuitively she felt that if she could find him and tell him her story, he would fight all the world for her.

She did not forget Dr. Meredith; but Bowie was the man who had impressed her as strong. He was a rock against which nothing could avail.

If she could not find him, then she must lose herself among the unnumbered multitude of the great city. She asked but time to recover her health, and then the opportunity to earn her own living. They were welcome to her money. As we have said, it had been only a curse to her ever since she could remember.

But for the hope of gaining it, her father might have led a quiet life.

So the fourth night came. She dared not wait longer.

She dressed herself in quiet, ladylike raiment, free from ostentation. Next she secured the jewels M. de Calignay had bought her—and he had been lavish for the sake of appearances. She was not taking anything which did not belong to her. They had been bought with her money. On the proceeds of their sale she hoped to live until she was well enough to work.

The hour was come. It was midnight. She opened the casement and stepped out into the night!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### HORRORS OF THE PLAGUE.

NEED we dwell on the terrors of that night flight? A thousand times she started and fled precipitately at the fancied sound of a footstep following her. A foe seemed lurking behind every bush to intercept her flight. Every shadow struck panic to her heart.

And yet the calm stars looked down, and no living thing crossed her path.

By the aid of the polar star and the broad Mississippi which she saw in the distance, she determined the direction of the city which was a City of Refuge to her. But the way was long, and she sunk faint by the wayside long before she reached her goal. Her strength, so little taxed of late, would not bear the strain. But the wine she had brought with her spurred her flagging energies, and she toiled on.

At last the distant horizon began to brighten. Rapidly the light diffused itself, mounting to the zenith, and finally overspreading the whole sky. It showed a dull gray canopy, approaching almost to saffron color in the east, mid which the sun rolled up a dingy red.

Its rays seemed to pierce the dead air like arrows, filling it with sultry oppressiveness.

To Miriam it seemed as if she could not get breath, yet no perspiration started from her feverish skin.

The city was now near at hand. She noticed that its towering chimneys did not belch their wonted volumes of black smoke into the air, though a general haziness was diffused everywhere. Of this she thought little at the time.

Next she noticed that navigation seemed stagnant on the smooth-flowing river. The levee, always bustling with busy life, now seemed deserted.

With tottering steps and swimming head the girl entered the town. Where was the gay throng that usually filled its thoroughfares with the sounds of bounding life? A funereal silence reigned on every hand!

Here and there a dray half laden was driven by a gloomy-browed driver. Here and there a solitary pedestrian glided along the streets as

if afraid of the sound of his own footsteps.

A man passed Miriam, and, gazing at her as if afraid of her, edged away to the curbstone. A woman met her, stopped and gazed at her in affright, put a handkerchief over her mouth and nose and crossed to the other side of the street.

What did it all mean? Why was there everywhere such silence and such gloom? Why did every one seem to shun her?

There was a pungent smell in the air—the odor of carbolic acid; and in alleyways, and at openings of the sewers the ground was white with strewn lime. And now she noticed on every hand doors draped with crape. Then up the street came a terrible spectacle—a cart loaded with coffins!

No need of further explanation. She knew that the city was stricken with the plague! The terrible scourge of the yellow fever was reaping its broad swath of desolation, sparing neither youth nor beauty, strong manhood nor helpless infancy.

The girl stopped in the shadow of a building where the hot sun could not so beat down into her brain. What could she do? Where could she go?

To return to the country meant death at the hands of her bitter foes. To remain in the city—what then? It was but death at most.

While she debated the subject in her mind two gentlemen, well-dressed and having the appearance of business-men, came toward her. They were talking earnestly. A look of gloomy depression was on their faces.

Just opposite Miriam one of them paused abruptly, turned to the curbstone, and with a slight retching, which apparently caused him no pain and little effort, vomited up a substance as black as ink. An instant he gazed at it, then turned to his friend in an agony of white-faced terror.

"My God, Harry! I'm a dead man!" he exclaimed. "Don't let Mary—"

But the words were never spoken. He put his hand to his head, staggered a step, and fell prone on the walk.

The survivor stared in mute dismay at his friend so suddenly stricken with death. Then he drew a strongly-camphorated handkerchief from his pocket and held it over his nostrils.

A covered carrier's-wagon chanced to be passing. The gentleman hailed the driver, who reined in his horse.

"Friend," said the gentleman, "I want this body carried a dozen squares, and I will give you fifty dollars to accommodate me."

"Yellow fever?" asked the driver.

"Yes."

"Fifty dollars won't pay me."

"It is all the money I have."

"Make it a hundred."

"Will you take my check?"

"Hum! Don't know you from Adam, boss!"

"I am Mr. Latham, of Latham and Brown, cotton brokers. That is my partner, Mr. Brown."

"Maybe so. Reckon we can't dicker, gov'nor. Don't want to git the fever fur nothin'. Gee-lang, thar!"

And he touched his horse with the whip.

Mr. Latham sprang to the horse's head, seized the bridle, and with a strong hand forced the animal upon his haunches.

With his right hand he drew a revolver, cocked the weapon and pointed it at the driver.

"Get down out of that wagon!" he said, in a voice of iron determination.

"Hold on, boss! You don't want to do no promiscuous shootin'!" said the driver, turning pale.

"My partner is going in your wagon, if I have to shoot you and drive it myself!"

"Have you got the fifty, pardner?"

"There is the money."

"All right! I reckon I was a little hasty."

The body was placed in the wagon; Mr. Latham mounted beside the driver; and the whole went on down the street.

Sick with horror Miriam sped away, going she knew not whither.

At last her tottering limbs refused to carry her further. Her head swum, and a dull pain lay along her spine, especially at the base of the brain. Her skin was dry and her tongue parched.

In her weakened condition had she so quickly contracted the plague? The thought thrilled her to the heart with dread.

She found herself before a house the front door of which stood open. Perhaps there were Christian people within who would not turn from the stranger who sunk languishing at their gate.

Feebly she mounted the steps and rung the bell. It was plainly audible, as if the doors of



the house were open. No one came to answer the summons. Was the house empty?

She felt her strength ebbing fast. If she waited longer she would sink in the street.

She entered. The rooms were in disorder and untenanted. It looked as if a robbery might have been committed when there was no one by to guard.

Were all the owners dead? Perhaps so. She had heard of such dreadful things.

She entered a bedchamber. The bed had not been dressed since last occupied. She could not be fastidious. She felt that she could not totter another step.

She managed to get on the bed and almost fainted away.

Sharp pains darted through her body. Her brain seemed on fire. Oh! for a drop of water to moisten her parched tongue!

She tried to rise to seek that which would quench her raging thirst. Her head swum and her strength failed.

She might die there alone!

No!—steps sounded through the house, and the low murmur of voices. The steps were hesitating, with pauses—perhaps stealthy. The voices were gruff. At any rate, human beings were near.

She waited.

They ascended the stairs and approached the room where Miriam lay. They appeared in the doorway—two men, a white and a negro.

Each carried a cudgel in his hand. They had a hangdog look. Their dark-browed, evil faces terrified the girl, as they stood looking in upon her.

They looked like human vultures—such monsters as haunt the night-covered battle-field, robbing the dead and killing the dying.

They entered the room.

In abject terror, Miriam closed her eyes, and in her heart cried to Heaven for protection.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A BRACE OF BOLD ROBBERS.

"SAM, we've treed somethin' hyar."

"Sartin sure, Massa Tom."

"Choice goods, I reckon."

"A—No. 1."

"She don't b'long hyar. Been travelin' on a country road. She's covered with dust."

"We 'uns hain't pertic'lar, so's it's good pickin's. Hyah! hyah!"

"Bet yer boots! Hallo! hyar's a glistener!"

The men had approached on either side of the bed on which the hapless Miriam lay trembling. Tom's exclamation was caused by his catching sight of a ring set with a small diamond on the girl's finger.

The ruffian seized the hand, and was about to pull off the ring, when Miriam opened her eyes and jerked the hand away.

"Oh, do not take that from me. It was my mother's. I will give you everything else I have," she cried.

The fellow doffed his hat in mock humility, and in a whimpering tone said:

"Aw, ma'am! Will ye, now? You're too good! We're two poor coves that's down on our luck, an' anything at all will be a godsend. Now, what might you have besides that little trinket?"

"You will not harm me? I am sick. Here is all that I have. Will you go away?" said the girl, disconnectedly. She was so terrified that she scarcely knew what she said or did.

With trembling fingers she took from her pocket all the jewelry she had brought away wrapped in a handkerchief.

"Thankee, ma'am. You're too good, ma'am. We'll never furgit ye, ma'am. Sich a kind heart—Great unregenerated Moses!"

"Fo' de Lo'd high golly!"

"Bu'st my filigree-work, ef you hain't a young gold an' diamond mine, ma'am, with all the modern improvements! Blow me to thunder, but you're a fortin to any man."

"Will you go and leave me, please?"

"Sam!"

"Massa Tom?"

"We've struck it rich."

"Hyah! hyah! hyah! you bet!"

"We'd better take the lady's advice, an git."

"Befo' somebody else comes an' knocks us out o' our plunder."

"Fur rocks!"

"Bet dis chile's ready to make hisself ska'se!"

"Hold on. That ring's worth somethin'. We might as well make a clean haul."

"Oh! do not deprive me of my mother's ring! You have everything else."

"Ma'am, I couldn't find it in my heart—indeed I couldn't—to leave so generous a lady without something as a keepsake to remember her by. It ain't the vally o' the ring, ma'am, I

beg you'll believe!—It's only something that'll remind me o' the pretty hand that treated me so handsome. Ma'am, fur generosity you do me proud! I'll never furgit ye—never! Ef I had a sister, I'd want her to be jest like you.

"Now, you'll jest take off that ring. It wouldn't be lucky, ye know, fur me to take it off."

The devilish irony of this polite robber made Miriam fear him more than if he had been brutally harsh. In terror lest he should touch her again, she removed the ring and gave it to him.

"Thankee, ma'am. Good-day, ma'am, an God bless ye, ma'am!"

"Sam!"

"Massa Tom?"

"We'll git!"

"You bet!"

And the two worthies made off without more ado.

Left alone, Miriam sunk back on her bed of pain utterly despondent. She had escaped bodily harm; but she was helpless and alone, where she might die with nobody near.

Not four minutes passed when she heard other steps and voices in the lower part of the house. Then heavy steps mounted the stairs. Were those terrible men returning?

With an effort she rose on her elbow and stared wildly at the door. There was an unnatural color in her cheeks, and an unnatural glitter about her eyes. The fever was doing its work. She was on the verge of delirium.

The doorway was darkened, and the two robbers reappeared. Their manner had undergone a change, however. The skulking knaves who had entered the room before, to go out in chuckling triumph, wore now a sullen, hangdog expression of countenance, as they sneaked forward, looking apprehensively behind them.

The cause of their fear was a man who was driving them before him with a cocked pistol.

When the bold robbers issued from the house upon the street something in their manner attracted the attention of a gentleman who was passing. Instantly he suspected foul-play, and drawing a revolver, he intercepted their flight.

"Hold on, my fine gentlemen, I want a word with you," he said, coolly.

"Boss, I reckon we hain't the parties you're after," said Tom.

"Oh, yes, you are. I've seen enough of your sort to know you when I see you. What have you been doing in that house?"

"Boss, we went in to ask fur cold vi't'als—I swear we did. Eh, Sam? What did we go in thar fur?"

"Dat's a fack, Massa Cap'n. We 'uns was powerful hungry. Dey's no work sense de yaller fever. Reckon Massa Tom 'd sell dis nig to get somefin t' eat, ef we wasn't brung up togeder. Ain't dat so, Massa Tom?"

"Comel comel what did you find in that house?" demanded the gentleman, impatiently.

Evidently he did not believe a word spoken.

"Jest nothin' at all, boss," replied Tom. "It's empty."

"We'll see about that. Go ahead of me, while I look for myself."

Tom and Sam exchanged glances. The white man was evidently a coward of the meanest type. Nothing better could be expected of his black ally.

"See hyar, boss," said Tom, "we did find a little somethin' in one o' the beaurers. Ef we give it up, I suppose you won't want us any longer?"

"Hand it over, and I'll see."

With the air of a whipped cur, Tom produced the jewels he had taken from Miriam.

"Thar, boss, that's all, so help me."

"You infernal scoundrel! Have you murdered a sick woman to get theses!"

"No, boss. I didn't touch her."

"Dat's so, Massa Cap'n. She'll tell ye so herse'f."

"Then there is a woman in the house? Go on ahead of me, I say! And if I catch you up to any tricks, mind your eye!"

So the party reached Miriam.

The girl screamed:

"MR. BOWIE!"

And burst into a wild, delirious laugh.

The man cried:

"My God!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

"YOU!"—"YES, I!"

JAMES BOWIE had been born and bred in a country where the *duello* was the recourse of gentlemen. To wipe out an insult with the blood of the insulter was not only no crime—it was demanded by honor. Let the reader remember that half a century, with its advance-

ment, has passed since his day; and considering the force of public opinion, and the fact that this custom had the sanction of immemorial usage, and was just then beginning to be condemned in the North, while in the South and West it was at its height in this country; and casting over all the mantle of charity, which is the gentlest and greatest of the virtues—judge him.

This man who could ruthlessly and without remorse kill a fellow-man who had insulted him, was noted for open-handed generosity, dauntless courage and sterling manhood. His genial friendship stood over against his implacable enmity.

He had fought other duels and forgotten them; but his encounter with the Curate had a new element. In some way—how he knew not—this man was connected with Miriam. By fighting him had he cut off all chance of knowing more of her?

The thought haunted him and aggravated the fever of his wounds, so as to retard his recovery. When he was sound again he wandered aimlessly about, scrutinizing every woman who approximated her appearance—hoping that chance would again throw her in his way.

He might have found her by following Sammy from the theater; but she had forbidden him to look for her directly. So he waited, never letting her out of his thoughts.

Spring lapsed into summer, and sultry August brought the terrible scourge! Then Bowie was filled with torturing fears.

She was poor. She could not command the means to leave the city. She must remain exposed to that awful danger. At any moment she might be stricken down, if she had not already fallen a victim and died without his knowing it.

These fears became so importunate that he resolved to seek her out, in spite of her prohibition, and try to induce her to fly from the city by his aid.

He went to the theater to find Sammy. It had been closed that morning, as was announced by a large placard, until the scourge of the plague should be lifted from the devoted city.

Sick at heart he turned away.

He might have left the city, but he would not. He went everywhere among the sick, the dying and the dead; but knowing only her first name his quest was hopeless.

Then Fate brought him to her, as we have seen.

She cried:

"Mr. Bowie!—"

Throwing up her arms with a delirious laugh.

He echoed:

"My God!"

He knew that she was before him, and that the deadly virus was in her blood. He flew to her, forgetful of the rascals, Tom and Sam, who seized the opportunity for incontinent flight.

The strong man grasped the hands of the weak woman and gazed into her face in dumb despair. If he could have given her his health and taken upon himself the fever that was just beginning to make her pulses throb, he would have done it gladly.

"I feel safe with you," she said. "Oh! I have been so frightened by those terrible men."

"Fear nothing further. You will always be safe with me," said Bowie, with a fervor that brought tears to his eyes.

"I came to look for you," pursued the girl. "I was afraid I should not find you, and then I should be all alone."

"You came to look for me?" asked Bowie, puzzled.

"Yes. They were trying to kill me—Leo, whom I loved so, and who I thought loved me, too. But they made everybody believe that I was crazy. Even Sammy thought so. But you do not, do you?"

She paused abruptly, gazing into his face with a terrible questioning in her eyes. She seemed to hold her breath for his answer, while she clung to his hand.

"No, I do not," said Bowie.

"Oh, thank you! I knew that you would not!"

I knew that if I could find you, you would believe me and protect me from them!"

In her gratitude she raised his hands and kissed them, before he was aware of her purpose.

The man was thrilled to his heart's core. She had known him but a short half-hour. What was the meaning of this confidence in him? Why had she sought him? His hopes formed an answer, but he dared not view it, lest it be too dazzling.

His heart bounded. He set his teeth hard, to hold himself in check. He struggled against



the tremor that shook every fiber of his being. In that moment the man was supremely happy—so happy that hope drove fear out of his heart. It could not be possible—so he felt—that she should have the taint of the fever in her blood.

But the girl kept on speaking.

"Everybody thought that grief for my father had disordered my reason. Oh, do you know?—my father—is dead—*killed!*"

Her voice sunk to a wail. She was drowned in tears. She told him the great affliction that had fallen upon her in that sweetly innocent, appealing way in which a child might go to its mother with its greatest grief.

By her words the man was hurled from a heaven of hope, down! down! down! to a hell of despair! It was as if an arctic frost had suddenly congealed his heart.

He had been sitting on the edge of the bed. He rose, tearing loose his cravat, which seemed to choke him. His face was ghastly white, and drawn with a horror that would never leave him.

The girl, overcome by grief, had covered her face with her hands, and did not see his emotion.

He tried to speak to her, to tell her that he was going for assistance, but no sound issued from his lips. Blindly he turned away and staggered out of the room.

He heard her call to him in a frightened voice; but he did not turn nor answer her. He could not.

His search for Miriam had familiarized Bowie with all the resources of the city for the care of the sick. In the great dearth of nurses and doctors few would have known so well as he where to go for immediate help.

Soon he stood in the presence of a woman arrayed in black robes, and with a white fillet bound above a pale, sweetly-sad face.

"Sister Marcia, I must have your attendance at once," he said, breathlessly. "In Heaven's name, do not deny me or delay. My patient is a woman, absolutely alone in a strange house, whose owners seem to have deserted it, if, indeed, they are not all dead."

The woman saw his ghastly face and heard his hoarse voice.

"I will go as you desire me," she said. "But you look as if you needed some one to care for you."

"No," he replied, with desperate bitterness. "God's curse rests more heavily upon me. He denies me the blessing of the plague! I shall pass unscathed—"

"*Blaspheme not!*" cried the woman, raising her rosary impressively. "Poor child of sin, shall you presume to scan the ways of the Infinite?"

Bowie bowed in mute submission to her reproach.

In a changed voice he asked:

"Where can I get a doctor?"

"The physician will be here at noon, and I will send him. Meanwhile I cannot give you more than an hour, morning and evening."

"I cannot get a doctor sooner?"

"Impossible."

"Let us go then."

They found Miriam in delirium. Everything was done that could be done to make her comfortable. Then the Sister of Charity returned to her other charges, leaving Bowie alone with a woman whose every word pierced his heart.

"Leo, do you know how it happened?" she said, in piteous accents. "He was murdered, Leo! Oh! look at those terrible stabs! They said it was in a duel, and that made it fair; but, oh! I know that God can never forgive a man who killed another like that!"

In an agony of spirit Bowie sunk on his knees at the bedside, clutched the bedclothes and buried his white, clammy face in them. So he listened while she raved, and the hours passed.

There was a step on the stair, but he heard it not. A man, pale and worn with unremitted labor that left him not the time for necessary sleep, entered the room.

He started at sight of the woman tossing in the delirium of fever, strode hastily forward, and clasping his hands as he bent over her, exclaimed:

"Great Heaven! can it be?"

Then Bowie raised his face, livid with pallor and damp with the sweat of unspeakable agony.

Recognizing him, the newly-arrived started again, his face became hard and stern, and raising his hand with a repulsive gesture, he cried:

"You!"

"Yes, I!"

And the man whose agony now reached its climax rose to his feet defiantly.

James Bowie and Dr. Meredith stood face to face, staring at each other across the bed on which Miriam Wingate lay unconscious of the presence of either!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### AT THE GATE OF DEATH.

EVERYDAY life has moments of terrible tragedy that defy delineation on the mimic stage. What art could reproduce the play of feature of a man whose soul was racked with the knowledge that his hand had struck down the father of the woman he loved? One who knew him was come perhaps to denounce him and thrust him out from her presence, that she might not be contaminated by his sacrilegious touch.

She had clung to his hands when no subtle instinct showed her the blood-stains on them. She had appealed to him, and he was ready to respond with the devotion of his life. But this man would raise a barrier between them that all the eternities could not break down.

As for Dr. Meredith, he saw at a glance, without explanation, that the man who had killed the father loved the daughter to madness. He saw the white agony in Bowie's face, and knew what he must be suffering. The spectacle disarmed him. The hand that had waved Bowie off like the interdict of an implacable judge, sunk to his side. The hard, forbidding lines faded out of his face.

At this the defiance of the man who feared nothing in human shape melted like snow before the summer sun. Tears sprung to his eyes and a sob unlocked his tightly-compressed lips. He clasped his hands and cried, in a piteous appeal:

"Because I robbed her of his life, would you have me leave her, too, to die? I bring her nothing but good now. She does not shrink from me. She knows nothing. She cannot know, if your lips are sealed. I have passed through the anguish of the damned! I beg of you—I implore you to spare me!"

He stretched forth his trembling hands across the bed, as a man who saw the gate of heaven about to be closed in his face.

In a voice broken with emotion, Dr. Meredith said:

"Enough! From the bottom of my heart I pity you! Let us work together for the salvation of her life."

"Oh! how can I thank you? I have no words—"

Bowie was about to approach the man whose magnanimity spared him; but Dr. Meredith raised his hand to check him, and interrupted in grave, not unkindly tones:

"I do not presume to be your judge, but I cannot touch your hand. I leave you with God!"

Bowie covered his face with his hands and stood quivering from head to foot.

When he gained self-command, he said:

"Perhaps you are right. Let us leave so unworthy a subject as myself, and think only of her."

"Let it be so," replied Dr. Meredith, gravely, and the battle for Miriam's life began.

Day after day the fever raged, until her form was wasted to a shadow, and her fair complexion was stained an ugly yellow. Day and night, without rest or sleep, Bowie watched at her bedside, his soul racked by her delirious words with anguish that knew no abatement. The name of her father was ever on her lips, showing how she had loved him, and how the blow that struck him down had crushed her to the earth. And every word pierced the soul of the duelist like the sting of the worm that dieth not!

When Sister Marcia came he received her dumbly. When she went he silently pressed her hand. Only his eyes appealed to her. They were bloodshot with incessant watching. They were hard and glassy with unintermitted grief. Even the cooling balm of tears was denied them.

And the woman, feeling her soul moved to its tenderest depths by his voiceless woe, alternately sought to cheer him with words of hope, and to reconcile him with the consolations offered by her religion.

He listened to her without impatience or opposition, yet in a way that showed that her words had no effect on him whatever. He had no hope—his resignation was the submission of despair!

Of course he could know nothing of Dr. Meredith's relations with Miriam; but the truth came to him by observation; for nothing that pertained to her could escape his vigilant scrutiny.

The time was come when Dr. Meredith could

prove himself one of those heroes that dare to fight hand to hand with death in its most terrible form. In that great lazar-house which comprised a whole city, whence thousands fled in mad panic, and where of those that were left the dead and dying seemed almost to outnumber the living, he stood firm, defending the citadel of life at a thousand points, beating back the demons of pestilence and death, and bearing the priceless boon of life and health wherever he went.

His time was more precious than diamonds, yet he gave of it freely to his fellow-men, reserving for himself only an hour now and then when exhausted nature refused longer to be denied.

Bowie knew this, and knew that an impartial distribution would leave but little time to each patient. Yet Dr. Meredith would come again and again, at any hour of the day or night, to Miriam's bedside, and give her the personal care that was usually left to the nurse.

When he ministered to her his hand shook with an unwonted loss of self-control. When she lay in a stupor, which took the place of sleep, he would stand and gaze at her with an anguish that wrung great beads of sweat from his brow. When she tossed in delirium, he would take her hands in one of his and place his other palm upon her forehead with a tenderness of touch whose significance could not be mistaken.

At such times his power over her was wonderful. Her cries and moans would sink into incoherent mutterings, which in turn would cease. The bounding blood would abate its headlong course, the fire of fever was allayed, and, yielding to the magnetic influence of the man, she would sink into the most natural sleep that she enjoyed at any time.

He never left her until he had quieted her thus, and even after she had sunk to repose he sometimes hung over her as if he could not tear himself away.

Once he brought another physician—a thing almost unheard of in the great dearth of medical skill—had him examine her, recounted all the varying symptoms, told him all that he had done and all that he proposed to do, and then hung upon his approval as if his own life—nay, more than that—hung in the balance.

All this Bowie saw and read the significance of; and to his other torture was added a stinging jealousy of the man whose touch alone could calm her wildest moments.

And yet, there was nothing mean or selfish in this jealousy. While it cut him to the heart to feel that he had a rival who possessed this positive power in opposition to the terrible disadvantage under which he himself labored, he would have walked to the ends of the earth—nay, he would have lost her to himself!—rather than deny her this help, even from his rival.

Only when the doctor was away he had her all to himself, and would then indulge his love and remorse. He could tell her all, then, knowing that his words conveyed no intelligence to her mind; yet it relieved him. And while she lay unconscious he would kiss her thin hands, and sometimes even her parched lips.

The fever was at its crisis. She lay as in a trance. As she awoke to consciousness so would fate decree life or death to her.

Dr. Meredith was not yet come, James Bowie knelt alone at the bedside, hanging upon the issue. In that moment his soul went out in a voiceless prayer for the boon of her life.

Suppose she should never wake, but die there! She lay so still that an agony of terror seized him at the thought. He hungered to kiss her once more while she yet lived. He bent over her and touched his lips to hers—airily, so as not to disturb her.

Dr. Meredith entered at that moment and saw the act. A wave of crimson swept his brow whose pallor had known no change for weeks. Furiously he cried:

"You infamous scoundrel! how dare you!"

And the man who never before had taken an insulting word tamely rose in self-defense, and retorted with that defiance which expends itself in words:

"I dare do anything! She is as much mine as yours!"

Once more these two men, whose emaciated forms and haggard looks seemed to make preparation for heaven more fitting than earthly dissension, glared at each other across the bed where lay the woman both loved.

What reply Dr. Meredith might have made was cut short.

The patient moved. She was about to awake! Bowie sunk upon his knees and again clasped her hand, gazing into her face with an eagerness that only the famished soul can feel.



She opened her eyes, looking him full in the face. The calm light of reason was in her eyes. A faint smile showed that she recognized him with pleasure. Her lips moved, and a voice as light as the sigh of a zephyr, articulated his name:

"Mr. Bowie!"

Then her eyes closed again.

A look of almost delirious triumph irradiated Bowie's countenance, as he raised his eyes to Dr. Meredith's face. It said:

"I have had her first smile of recognition! I defy your power!"

Dr. Meredith was dumb. It seemed as if a mocking fate had dealt him an altogether uncalled-for blow in the face. To be sure, he had no claim to her—he had no right to expect anything; but all the same it hurt him to feel that chance had taken sides against him, as it were. This man who had killed her father was certainly unworthy. Why was anything given to him?

But, James Bowie looked back at Miriam, now lying with closed eyes, and a change came over his face. First came a fear—she might even now slip away from life! Then came a hope—Dr. Meredith might save her! Lastly, a fiery conflict—Dr. Meredith—his rival!

There was a moment of agonized indecision. Then the great magnanimity of the man triumphed.

"You have more power than I," he said, beseechingly. "This is your place. Come and save her!"

He rose and stepped aside.

Dr. Meredith saw and recognized what underlay the act. Then only his eyes showed his appreciation.

Without a word he stepped into Bowie's place, took Miriam's hand, and rested his palm on her forehead.

She did not open her eyes or move, but a change came over her. All the muscles seemed to adjust themselves to repose. Her breath came faintly, yet in regular respirations. A slight moisture appeared on her forehead beneath Dr. Meredith's palm. She slept, sweetly, peacefully! She was saved!

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### OUT OF THE SHADOW.

For long minutes Dr. Meredith sat perfectly motionless, watching the sleeping girl, while Bowie stood aloof looking at both with feelings that cannot be described.

With a sigh the doctor arose and turned away. His movements were slow, his steps were feeble, like those of an old man. He beckoned James Bowie to follow him out of the room.

They passed out on tip-toe, so that they might not disturb her. In the hall the doctor faced Bowie and said:

"I have been thinking that there may be a misunderstanding. Do you know that she is a married woman?"

It came like a staggering blow. Bowie seized hold of the stair-rail to steady himself.

"A what?" he asked, after a pause, in which he seemed to try to realize what he had heard.

"A married woman. That was what prompted my words."

"Married?" repeated Bowie, brushing his hand across his forehead.

Then in a slow, *distracted* way he added:

"No. I did not know."

"I apologize for the opprobrium in my words," said the doctor. "On the impulse—"

"It is not necessary," interrupted Bowie. "I have forgotten what you said. When was she married, and to whom?"

The whole manner of the man was changed. He seemed so broken.

Dr. Meredith paused, knowing what he must communicate.

"Cannot you tell me?" asked Bowie, looking at him without apparent emotion.

"I hesitate to pain you—"

"I thank you for your consideration. It is thrown away, however. I have lost the sense of pain. Go on."

"She was married over her father's death-bed—"

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was an involuntary catching gasp, which showed that the center of feeling was not yet blunted to insensibility.

"To M. de Calignay," concluded Dr. Meredith.

At that James Bowie started erect. All weakness seemed to fall away from his wasted frame. The blood leaped into his pale face.

"To M. Raoul de Calignay?" he repeated, in a strong voice.

"Yes."

"Then, by the gods—"

He raised his clenched hand above his head, but suddenly broke off, and letting his hand fall to his forehead, turned away. His fictitious strength disappeared as suddenly as it had come upon him. His shoulders resumed the stoop they had never known until that terrible week of despairing vigil.

He was about to re-enter the sick chamber when Dr. Meredith stopped him.

"What is it?" he asked, in sudden panic.

"Nothing! Nothing!"

But the doctor would not be put off.

"Why should she not marry Raoul de Calignay?"

"I know of no reason."

"But your words, your excitement implied as much."

"I did not intend they should."

"Man! man! do not equivocate!" cried the doctor, in uncontrollable excitement. "I adjure you to tell me what you know!—and if he has wronged her, I swear that I will kill him!"

At that Bowie turned and faced the doctor with an icy smile.

"If he had harmed her, in so much as a feather's weight, in anything that could be taken cognizance of by statutory or social law, do you think that I would wait for you to avenge her? Trust me; she shall never lack a champion while I live!"

He went back to Miriam, and Dr. Meredith was left alone in the hall.

From that hour Miriam's convalescence began. Now that delirium no longer held her mind in thrall she made no reference to her father, or indeed to her past life.

A marked change was wrought in Bowie. Had she been an Eastern queen and he her devoted slave, his attentions could not have been more reverently deferential. Now when she lay asleep, he never so much as kissed her hand.

Day by day Dr. Meredith came, as often as he had a moment to spare. As she grew stronger, his step became more feeble. She no longer needed him professionally, yet he continued to come. It rested him only to look at her—to be near her.

She urged him to take more rest, but he shook his head. He said that the dying on every hand claimed him until his strength should fail utterly.

"The papers are full of your unflinching heroism, your unflagging devotion. Your name has gone to the ends of the Union—all over the civilized world indeed, among those who have done their duty nobly and well, while I remain here idly, doing nothing. See! I am now well and strong again. I must bear my share of the burden. You make me ashamed of myself. You must now step out, while I step into the ranks."

She walked across the room several times, and went through some callisthenic movements with her arms, to show how strong she was.

Dr. Meredith smiled faintly. It gave him great pleasure to see that her old grace of movement was returned.

"They cannot spare me, nor do they need you yet," he said. "For the present you can serve others best by taking care of yourself."

He essayed to rise from his chair, but sunk back with sudden vertigo. A stinging pain shot through his brain and along his spine. Dark spots floated before his eyes.

Miriam was at his side instantly.

"Oh! see how ill you are!" she exclaimed.

"It has come at last," he said. "I have been fighting it off for days. There is no use in disguising the truth from you. I cannot leave this room."

Miriam clung to his hands, and began to pant and tremble with fright.

"Oh, what can we do for you?" she cried.

"Be calm. I believe that I shall conquer the disease. You must not expose yourself to a relapse by watching over me until you become exhausted."

Bowie now interposed. His eyes were restless with suppressed excitement. He spoke with enforced composure.

"If you will withdraw a moment, Miss Miriam, I will get Dr. Meredith into bed," he said.

With a woman's care the girl arranged the bed for its new occupant, and then left the room.

Bowie got the doctor in bed. Then he stood before him and said:

"I know that you will soon be delirious."

struggle against it as you may. Before you take command over yourself I wish to impress you indelibly with one idea: *In God's name do not expose me!*"

He took the doctor by the shoulders, and gazing steadfastly into his eyes, went on:

"Can you retain this impression? Will you do as I wish?"

The doctor looked back at him, and said:

"I will, if it is within my power!"

"May God reward you! I can only thank you!" said Bowie, with deep emotion.

The spark had fallen upon dry tinder, and soon the conflagration raged again.

In the terrible days that followed, James Bowie watched beside his new patient as assiduously as he had beside the old, but from a different reason. One word from those delirious lips might blast his life forever! And ever that word seemed trembling on those lips, as if a mocking demon had devised this method of torment. The burden of Dr. Meredith's ravings was:

"Hush! hush! I must not tell! What must I not tell, do you ask? Ah! that is the secret! You cannot get it from me. This keeps ringing through my brain: '*In God's name do not expose me!—do not expose me!—do not expose me!*'"

Naturally Miriam speculated as to what the secret might be that preyed so upon his mind; and Bowie's soul was pierced by her unconscious questions.

Meanwhile the slender thread of life seemed as if it might be snapped at any moment. Then a terrible thought came into Bowie's mind. If this man died without telling her, she might never know! The slightest neglect on his part might turn the wavering balance. It haunted him day and night, yet he remained steadfast.

And all the while he saw the strange tenderness with which Miriam ministered to the sick man. A subtle tie seemed to link these two, as if they were complements of a perfect whole. She had, in almost as marked a degree, the same influence over him that he had over her.

So the crisis passed; and Dr. Meredith, as he had prophesied, conquered the disease. But he was like an infant in the hands of the woman who cared for him with almost a motherly instinct. She would sit by him for hours, only holding his hand, while he lay with closed eyes, yet not sleeping.

What James Bowie felt during that time, no pen can describe. But he was mute. He made no sign.

At last came the Heaven-sent frost, and the terrible plague was staid. Those who had fled began to return to the purged city, and business that had long lain prostrate renewed its life.

It was ascertained that all the former tenants of the house our friends had occupied so long were dead. Arrangements were made with the heirs to rent the house, and, to preserve the proprieties, an elderly widow was engaged as housekeeper and companion for Miriam.

This was done without consulting the girl. No word had passed with reference to herself. Dr. Meredith wanted everything to flow along smoothly, as a matter of course, until she should herself broach the subject of her future. As for Miriam, she shrunk from all reference to her marriage. So no word had been spoken.

They were in the little parlor when Bowie announced the completion of arrangements.

"Meanwhile," he said, "I have a pleasant surprise for you, Miss Miriam." (He had persistently called her that.) "I have just picked up a friend, whom you will be glad to see."

And crossing the hall, he opened the lobby door and ushered in—*Sammy*.

Miriam's delight was instantaneous and without disguise. Sammy could not speak, as he held her hands.

At that moment the door-bell rung.

Bowie went to the door.

"Ah! Pray announce Mlle. Leoline and M. de Calignay," said a voice familiar to all; and as James Bowie fell back in dismay, the Frenchman pushed by him and stood bowing with his hand on his heart in the parlor door.

Behind him was Leoline. After her was Ezreth Quirk, Esq.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A CHALLENGE DECLINED.

MIRIAM'S flight was not discovered until morning. Then M. de Calignay was furious. Of course she had sought the city, and there her persecutors could not follow her without incurring the almost fatal risk of infection from the plague.

"If she would but take the fever, it would re-



lieve us from all further trouble," was M. de Calignay's cold-blooded suggestion.

He knew of no one to whom he could intrust the search for Miriam, save his henchman, Quirk; but that lucky rascal had fled Northward, he knew not whither.

In this strait he concluded to let matters rest until the abatement of the plague; for even a million dollars would not tempt him to risk a day in New Orleans, where men were dying off "like sheep."

However, he was among the first to return. Failing to find any record of Miriam's death, he began a careful search for her person, until one day fortune favored him.

Quirk, who had returned, was in consultation with his master and Leoline, when the party saw James Bowie and Sammy meet on the street. Sammy's excitement and evident delight showed plainly that unusual news was being imparted to him. M. de Calignay made a happy guess that it might be the presence of Miriam in the city, and determined to follow the two, which he did with the result narrated in the last chapter.

At sight of him Miriam uttered a sharp cry of fear, and shrunk to Dr. Meredith's side, grasping his arm.

The doctor turned pale and rose to his feet, holding to the back of the chair for support, for his strength was not yet returned.

"*Monsieur le Docteur Meredith!*" said the Frenchman, with sarcastic emphasis. "Can I express to you *ze* surprise—*ze* pleasure *zat* I find madame, my wife, in your company? Miriam, my poor child, can I tell what we have suffered at losing you?"

He advanced toward her; but Dr. Meredith interposed his hand.

"One moment, if you please, sir," he said. "I have asked the lady nothing—she has explained nothing; but is it not strange that you should be seeking her only now, after so long a separation?"

"Monsieur," said the Frenchman, coldly, "I apprehend no difficulty in *zis* case. I claim my wife; I reimburse you for any expense you may have incurred, and pay you for your professional services. Is anything more simple?"

"Sir, you owe me nothing. Whether the lady accompanies you from here will rest with her own election."

"Miriam!" exclaimed Leoline, stretching forth her arms.

M. de Calignay grasped her wrist and put her aside.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am content. But first I must have words with you *zat* are note suitable for *ze* ears of *ze* ladies. Shall we withdraw?"

"This way, if you please," said Dr. Meredith, and he led the way to the back parlor.

M. de Calignay and James Bowie followed him.

"Gentlemen," said the Frenchman, "I need note remind you *zat* a woman's reputation is a delicate thing. What she shall fear most is publicity. You say *zat* my wife have told you nothing of *ze* domestic difference *zat* have placed us in *zis* embarrassing position. It is delicacy characteristic of her. Gentlemen, I would emulate her. I have no desire to drag my private affairs before *ze* world. If I see my wife alone and induce her to return with me on her own free will, it is no further concern of yours. Is it note so?"

As loth as they might feel, neither gentleman could do less than bow assent to this proposition.

"Zere is one person already in our confidence—my niece. You have no objection to her being present at *ze* interview from which you are excluded?"

No exception could be taken to this.

"Very well. Now, sir," turning to Dr. Meredith alone, "I may as well conclude my business with you. I need note put my grievance into words. If you are a gentleman you will note deny me *zat* satisfaction which custom accords."

And the challenger folding his arms across his breast stared insultingly into the doctor's face.

"I understand your challenge, sir," said Dr. Meredith, with quiet dignity; "but I do not recognize that code of honor which compels a gentleman to set himself up as a target for the first ruffian who happens to be seized with the whim to shoot at him. If I have injured you in any way, you have your appeal to the law of the land. That is designed for the protection of all good citizens."

"Gentlemen do note settle *zeir* differences like clowns!" said the Frenchman, severely.

"Gentlemen should settle their differences in

accordance with the laws of God and man," replied Dr. Meredith, with dignity.

"Bah! *zat* is *ze* coward's plea!" cried the Frenchman.

Dr. Meredith's fist shot straight from the shoulder, and took M. de Calignay fairly between the eyes.

Bowie caught his arm in time to destroy the force of the blow. Still it was a blow given and received. He then stepped between the contestants.

"Gentlemen, pray do not forget yourselves!" he said.

M. de Calignay was furious.

"If you deny me satisfaction now, I will shoot you down, like a dog, at sight!" he cried.

"I shall always hold myself in readiness to repel assault," said the doctor, coolly.

"More *zan* *zis*—I will post you on *ze* street corner!"

"If you dare to slander me, I will cowhide you on the very corner where you do your posting!" was the prompt retort.

Dr. Meredith forgot that he was a little inconsistent in having recourse to personal violence; but he was adopting the Northern custom, which only condemned that encounter whose direct aim was the taking of life.

While Bowie was not sorry for the indignity put upon M. de Calignay, yet he could not fully sympathize with Dr. Meredith in refusing the duello.

"We will see," was M. de Calignay's portentous rejoinder to Dr. Meredith's threat.

Then he bowed:

"With your permission!"

And opened the door to the front parlor.

By Dr. Meredith's invitation all retired to the back parlor, save Miriam, Leoline and M. de Calignay.

There were twenty minutes of terrible suspense. Then M. de Calignay threw open the communicating door. His face was radiant, triumphant!

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### CROWDED TO THE WALL.

WHEN the gentlemen withdrew Miriam was filled with undefined fear. It seemed as if her enemies would triumph again. M. de Calignay seemed to mold every one to his purpose. Why had the two men on whom she relied consented to listen to him? If they failed her, she felt that she was powerless to resist him any longer.

She did not take into account that she had told them nothing; and that they could see in her only a woman for some reason estranged from her husband. The few disjointed sentences she had spoken to Bowie on first seeing him had made no lasting impression, he thinking her delirious at the time.

Sammy went to her side, drawn by her appealing eyes. With all his familiarity with the stage, he was slow to suspect tragedies in real life. He did not see any harm in M. de Calignay, more than in ordinary men. Few of us are quick to apprehend any unusual wickedness in our intimate friends who have the air of respectability.

Ezreth Quirk, Esq., arrayed in perfectly gorgeous attire, was the personification (according to his notion) of judicial dignity.

Leoline was a wounded dove.

Not a word was exchanged by this interesting group.

When M. de Calignay entered the front parlor, and Ezreth Quirk, Esq., and Sammy withdrew, leaving Miriam alone with her two most dreaded foes, the girl felt utterly helpless and alone. She did not understand it; but somehow her two champions had been talked over, and deserted her.

"Miriam," said M. de Calignay, "we may as well come to a clear understanding at once. Of course you fully understand *zat* before *ze* law you are my wife in *ze* fullest sense of *ze* word. By *ze* law no cognizance will be taken of any agreement between us inconsistent with marriage as ordinarily accepted. Now, let me show you what constitutes a husband's rights and a wife's duty, as set forth in *ze* law. Here is a copy of Blackstone. You may read for yourself."

He took a volume from Ezreth Quirk, Esq.'s, bag, opened it and pointed her to the Common Law on the subject under discussion.

The girl read mechanically, and, knowing nothing of the difference between the theory and practical working of the law, saw that she was her husband's property, which he could reclaim wherever found, very much as he could regain possession of a domestic animal, "lost, strayed, or stolen."

Her utter helplessness made her sick at heart; yet she would not yield without a struggle.

"The law cannot give you the right to kill me; and that was what you were doing," she said, with a shudder at the terrible recollection.

"Oh, Miriam!" sighed Leoline; and one would have thought her a saint crushed by ingratitude.

"*Zat* is too improbable a story to gain credence," said M. de Calignay, unmoved. "Here is what it would avail you. Suppose your over-zealous friends, here, would believe you and refuse to give you up to me peaceably? By a writ of *habeas corpus* I would bring *ze* case before *ze* courts. Zere I would prove our unremitted kindness to you, and *ze* aberration of mind in which you gained *zis* false impression and left us. You know *zat* *zis* can be proved by half a dozen witnesses. *Zis* alone would break down your story; and *ze* court would give you up to me."

"But would I stop here? No! I would prove *zat* *zis* man, Dr. Meredith, was in love with you, and you with him. Ah!"

He stopped with an ejaculation of fiendish exultation, seeing the girl leap to her feet, crimson to the tips of her ears.

"*Ze* world will note judge you leniently, when it hears *zat* you fled to him, and have been living under his protection all *zese* weeks. Do you wish to stand up in court and try to persuade *zem* of your innocence?"

Miriam sunk back into her chair, panting. Such wickedness stunned her.

"I would stake my life on your innocence," pursued the Frenchman, "because I know you. But you will find *zat* strangers—and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, friends also—prefer to believe evil rather *zan* good."

"But see; I will throw *ze* blame all on him, saying *zat* he tried to beguile your innocence. Zerefore I am willing to take you back to my heart and my home. People will laugh at my credulity, and will say I must be a good man to be such a fool. *Ze* judge will tell you to go back to your husband, and thank God *zat* you have one generous enough to view your conduct in so favorable a light."

"Next, I will challenge him and kill him in a duel—Ah! you start again! You betray your love for him! You know how well I can shoot. I shall not miss his heart by half an inch! And I will have *ze* sympathy of *ze* world. Zey will say I am not so much of a fool, after all, I have vindicated my honor."

"Still, one point more. How do you suppose I would receive you back into my home? If you go with me now, freely, *ze* old life shall begin again. You are free; your wifehood is but a shadow. If you compel me to vindicate my rights before a court of law, I will not only establish *zem*, but *claim* *zem*! Do you understand?—*you shall be my wife, not only in seeming, but in fact!*"

Miriam was crushed.

M. de Calignay could be terribly impressive when he chose. Now he bent over this cowering girl like an implacable fate; and his low, hurried words, which could not have been distinguished by any one listening at the keyhole, (could such a thing have been possible,) sunk into her soul like drops of molten lead.

Still another was deeply impressed by his words. So intently realistic was his manner, that, in spite of his repeated assurances, Leoline feared that he might really intend to put his threat into execution. The jealous pang she experienced was made manifest by her starting up and grasping the edge of the table spasmodically, while her eyes glittered and her lips were drawn back from her clenched teeth.

To reassure her, M. de Calignay went on, addressing Miriam:

"For your person I care not'ing—absolutely not'ing! You are as unattractive to me as it were possible for a woman to be. But, if you make me *ze* laughing-stock of *ze* world, I will crush you with shame for which *ze* world will have no sympathy."

"Now, will you go voluntarily, or will you go later by compulsion of law?"

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED.

WHAT could the helpless girl say? What could she do? She was overwhelmed.

"Come! come!" urged Calignay. "Ze gentlemen in *ze* other room await your decision. Zey will not interfere with your decision. If you go, you go!—if you stay, you stay!"

Now the girl rose, pale yet resolute.

"Raoul de Calignay," she said, with a grand, womanly dignity, "I do not know by what power my friends fall away from me at your bidding. By your subtle arts you beguiled even my



poor father, so that he trusted in you implicitly. Abandoned by all earthly help, I know that here I am in your power, and I therefore submit. But in the Hereafter, God will avenge my wrongs. You cannot blindfold His justice!"

"I can answer your doubts," replied M. de Calignay, in a modified tone. "Your friends do not interfere because they know that you are powerless before the law. Your father was not deceived; I intended and still intend to do you justice, if you do not persist in making me the butt for the ridicule of every wag in New Orleans."

He turned, swung open the communication door, and said:

"Gentlemen, Madame de Calignay has decided to return to her home!"

His triumphant face had prepared them for his words; but to James Bowie and Dr. Meredith they sounded like words of doom.

Miriam was in the act of leaving the room to get her hat and mantilla, so that they did not see her face.

"Gentlemen," interposed Ezreth Quirk, Esq., in his most pompous style, "it seems to me meet that we should congratulate each other on the happy issue of what promised to be a most painful breach of domestic felicity, and on the perfect good feeling that has existed between opposing counsel—I—I beg your pardon—I should have said between gentlemen whose interests seemed in conflict, though all have the lady's welfare at heart. Gentlemen, allow me to proffer the amity of the profession."

He advanced with outstretched hands—one each for Bowie and Dr. Meredith.

Those gentlemen ignored him utterly, neither deigning so much as a look.

Seeing this, the lawyer dropped his hands with a wave, as if only a bow had been intended. His equanimity was not at all ruffled.

"Gentlemen, I trust that you are satisfied?" said M. de Calignay.

"We have no opposition to make to the lady's will," said James Bowie, answering for both.

"Thank you!"

M. de Calignay bowed with mock deference. His triumph was complete.

Miriam reappeared, equipped for the street. In silence she gave her hand to James Bowie.

Had either been in a normal state, the hand of the other would have felt like ice.

Dr. Meredith came next. For a single instant her eyes were raised to his; and blended with their unutterable woe was a look of reproach that he did not understand, yet which pierced him to the depths of the soul.

Their hands fell apart as if each was struck with palsy!

She turned away, in her agony forgetting Sammy, who had hung back, looking bewildered and pained beyond expression. When the youth saw that he was forgotten, his lip quivered and his eyes filled so that he could scarcely see her as she passed down the hall and out of the door, walking as one might walk to death.

The look in Miriam's face had filled Dr. Meredith's heart with a new purpose. He felt that something terrible underlay her union with the man to whom he had seen her married. That her association with him must be a living death, her evident horror of him amply showed. By what power he coerced her will Dr. Meredith could not imagine. That the Frenchman was utterly ruthless, he believed. Subject to his cruelty, she must die at no distant day.

For this there was but one remedy, since she voluntarily went back to her bondage. Was it wrong, then, to seek her release by killing her persecutor?

Dr. Meredith did not dwell long on the moral niceties of this question. He believed that the woman he loved was being persecuted to death. Her look of reproach called him mutely to her succor. He responded at once!

As M. de Calignay was about to pass out he touched him on the elbow.

"A moment, if you please!"

M. de Calignay bowed compliance, and stepped back in the room.

"I have reconsidered my determination," said the doctor. "Give me two weeks in which to recover my strength, and I am at your service. Here is my card. Your friends will know where to find me."

As if it were an exchange of the most ordinary courtesy, M. de Calignay exchanged cards, and bowed himself out of the house.

James Bowie stood like a statue, white to the lips. In that hour came to him the most terrible temptation of his life!

And this is the temptation that was presented to James Bowie:

He knew that M. de Calignay had the reputation of being a "dead shot." Suppose he

fought with Dr. Meredith? The latter was a Northern man, and knew absolutely nothing about dueling. As his purpose was evidently to fight the Frenchman to the death, he must in all probability fall.

That would at once remove James Bowie's only real rival, and the only man who could tell her that he had killed her father.

To have got rid of this man when the opportunity presented itself before, during his illness, would have involved criminal neglect—in fact, nothing short of murder. But this duel was another thing. It was none of Bowie's business if the doctor chose to fight. He had not the remotest agency in his death.

After Dr. Meredith's death, Bowie could himself fight M. de Calignay. If the fortune of battle went against the latter—and Bowie had no doubt of his own powers—Miriam would be released, and—

"Great Heaven! I am her only friend! What would stand between us? Granted that she loves him now; she would forget him in time; and then—"

The possibilities made the man dizzy. Without taking leave of the doctor, or indeed looking at him, he seized his hat and left the house.

Left with those two men whose great distress was traced in every line of their faces, Sammy had slipped away unobserved. He shared his misery with no human being. But nature has her compensations. His soul was passing through the furnace, to come forth purged of dross.

They were all gone. Dr. Meredith sat alone!

His mind was no longer perturbed by the prejudices of social distinctions. He had studied Miriam. She stood forth on her individual merits as a woman. Her parentage—her associations weighed nothing. The purity of her soul vindicated its own dignity. She stood apart from and above all the world.

But, was she not lost to him?

He sat alone. The hours lengthened, until the shadows of night gathered around. Still he sat in the darkness, without motion!

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE DUEL.

MEANWHILE James Bowie was pacing the streets of the city, a fugitive from the tempter, yet carrying the temptation about with him in his heart.

It was nearly midnight when he returned. He found Dr. Meredith sitting in the darkness. The light from gaslights in the street made his figure just distinguishable.

Neither spoke. Bowie sat down, and the silence continued.

Presently Bowie said:

"You mean to kill him?"

"Yes," was the laconic reply, in a hard, inflexible tone.

"In order to release her?"

"Yes."

"What do you know of the use of a pistol?"

"Nothing."

"Can you handle a knife or rapier? As the challenged party, you have the choice of weapons."

"I have never had a dueling instrument of any kind in my hand."

"Ah! that is worse than I feared. I need not tell you that he is a dead-shot."

"I have no fear of him."

"On what do you rely for success?"

"On God!"

A hush of awe fell between them. It was strange to invoke the Deity to aid in the breaking of his most stringent law—"Thou shalt not kill!" Impressed with only one aspect of the case, Dr. Meredith did not notice the inconsistency.

After a time Dr. Meredith spoke.

"May I rely on your friendship in this matter?"

"Unquestionably. May I begin with a suggestion?"

"I shall be glad to listen."

"The pistol is your only hope. In two weeks you may learn something of that. Then the merest accident may favor you. For the knife or rapier you have not the strength, even if you could acquire any skill in so short a time. Will you select the pistol?"

"Yes. I had no other idea."

"Then it is necessary that you steady your hand by the most careful living. Of first importance is sleep. You must begin now, by retiring at once. To-morrow morning you shall begin target-practice."

The gentlemen arose. Dr. Meredith went to bed, and by a strong effort of will forced his mind away from distracting thoughts, and slept.

James Bowie sat down before the open window of his room, where the cool night breeze could blow on his fevered temples. For him sleep was impossible.

Reader, have you ever reflected on the actualities of a duel, stripped of all sentiment? In the days of chivalry the gauntlet was thrown down and accepted, and the fight took place on the spot, in the heat of the moment. In modern times some duels have been fought with almost equal promptness. But this is the more usual course:

A gentleman wounds the "honor" of another. A challenge passes. Friends are invited to arrange the combat. Here begins a trial of diplomacy, each party of seconds trying to secure advantages—fair or otherwise—to its principal. The choice of weapons, the loading of weapons, the manner of firing, the person who is to give the signal, the signal itself, the place and time of meeting, are all considered; and the best men score the most points.

Then comes the drilling of the principals. They are taught to fire as nearly as may be instantaneous with the signal. A quick shot may be worth a life! After they can shoot with a certain degree of accuracy, a stuffed effigy may be placed before them, until they learn to judge the position of a man's heart from the outlines of his figure. Next, one of their seconds may exchange blank shots with them until they are accustomed to being fired at, so that the movements of their real adversary, or the flash of his pistol, may not disconcert them.

After this comes such a dress as will present the least conspicuous mark to the eye, blending as much as may be with the shadows of the landscape, and in some cases even disguising the figure so as to delude the eye.

Arriving on the ground, every inequality, every variety of background, is considered and skirmished over by the seconds.

When a satisfactory compromise is effected, two human beings, who have been drilled to murder, consummate their folly and wickedness! Afterward comes cowardly flight from the law (where the law has real validity) for the survivor.

This is dueling! This is the vaunted vindication of "honor!"

At the end of the first week James Bowie stood face to face with this conviction: Dr. Meredith could not be taught (at least in so short a time) to fire the pistol with sufficient accuracy to make his fighting with M. de Calignay anything but a cold-blooded murder, in which he would be the helpless victim!

During that week James Bowie had never had a moment's rest from the conflict that was rending his heart. Now every consideration of magnanimity and unselfish love crowded upon him, forcing him into the line of conduct against which he had been fighting.

"If Dr. Meredith falls before M. de Calignay, Miriam Wingate will never smile again!"

That was what his heart told him.

Suppose, on the other hand, he should anticipate Dr. Meredith's duel, and kill M. de Calignay?

She might look upon him with horror as a murderer; but she would wed his rival and be happy.

There was one drop of comfort in this bitter cup. When she had learned why he had fought M. de Calignay—and perhaps Dr. Meredith would be magnanimous enough to tell her—she could not look upon his act otherwise than with great leniency, knowing that she owed her happiness to it. She must remember him, then, with some tenderness.

All day long the fierce battle between love for self and love for another had been raging. Toward night his resolve was suddenly taken. The truer love had won!

Now, that he had determined to sacrifice self, he was possessed of a feverish impatience. With great strides he sought the St. Charles Hotel, where he expected to find M. de Calignay.

That gentleman was standing at the entrance of the hotel, smoking. He saw Bowie approaching, and a black scowl of hatred darkened his brows.

As if not noticing him, Bowie brushed by him rudely.

M. de Calignay threw him off with his arm, crying:

"What, fellow! Dare you jostle me?"

Bowie stopped instantly, and as he stood before the Frenchman with his powerful frame and the fierce expression peculiar to his face heightened by its pallor, he looked what he was, a man whom few would have the temerity to move to anger.

But M. de Calignay had a particular reason



for hating James Bowie just then, which we will relate in the next chapter, so that he was in no wise loth to have an excuse for quarreling with him.

Bowie looked him from head to foot, and said with cool sarcasm:

"I am a fellow who is in the habit of having such gentlemen as yourself make way at his approach! I always hold myself in readiness to prove my right to deference of *that* sort. If you are unwilling to concede it, I shall be glad to demonstrate it to your satisfaction at sunrise to-morrow."

"You shall not lack the opportunity, sir," retorted the Frenchman, promptly. "My friends can find you—"

"In the hotel, where I will engage a private parlor at once for their reception."

"Expect zem within an hour."

The gentlemen bowed. Bowie went into the hotel. Calignay passed down the street.

The picnic grounds north of the Crescent City were usually deserted early in the morning. But the rising sun, looking down a vista of trees, on the morning next following the incidents narrated above, saw two men standing at twelve paces, and four others variously disposed—one standing near a case of surgical instruments, another holding a handkerchief at arm's-length. In the background were two awaiting carriages.

The man with the handkerchief spoke in a dull, monotonous voice:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

A pause. Then he resumed, in measured rhythm:

"One! two! FIRE!"

And the handkerchief dropped from his hand. There was a simultaneous discharge of two pistols.

One of the men fell forward on his face. The other shivered from head to foot, and put his hand to his breast.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A HUMAN TIGRESS.

THE plotters once more held their victim in their power. Miriam could offer no further resistance. She looked forward to death as the only release from her troubles. They had but to let her alone and the canker at her heart would soon eat her life away.

This was M. de Calignay's plan. He knew that she would die, and he feared to run any further risk.

But the thought of waiting for time to remove Miriam from her path drove Leoline beside herself. Jealousy made her doubt M. de Calignay's sincerity.

"Oh, Raoul! Raoul! you have betrayed me! This is what I feared!" she cried. "And now do you suppose that I shall be content and wait and wait, while we grow old together? Never! She shall die at once, by my hand! You have no love for me! You have deceived me from first to last, and made me your tool!"

She had wept, supplicating and upbraiding him by turns until his patience was exhausted. Now he clutched her by the wrist, and in his iron way, said:

"If you dare to harm a hair of her head, you shall repent it to the last instant of your existence!"

He had never spoken to her so before. The woman stared at him, panting, quivering.

In a hoarse whisper she said:

"You love her! I see it! Well, go to her! Keep her! You are welcome! There is one who loves me. I will go to him! I can afford to be frank with you now. I loved your money!—I love him for himself alone! Good-evening!"

Without a word further—without a look at him, she left the room.

The man was thunderstruck. Heretofore she had always been at his feet. Now her smile of icy contempt sent a chill to his heart. Could he have been mistaken in her? A scene flashed before his mind—her parting with James Bowie at the green-room door.

The fierce jealousy he had experienced at that moment had been allayed by her fascinations. Suppose those fascinations had been exerted only to win the million for which she knew he was plotting?

The smile with which she dismissed Bowie had haunted him more than once. Bowie was young—so much nearer her own age. He was a magnificent-looking young fellow—a blonde, too, her opposite, while M. de Calignay, coincident with her, was of the darker style.

She could refer to no one but him. A deadly purpose formed in M. de Calignay's heart. James Bowie must die!

He left the house, and while in this mood was

insulted by the very man he wished to quarrel with.

He could not know that Leoline had gone from his presence direct to her room, and there, overcome by emotion, fallen to the floor in a swoon. Such, however, was the fact. It was the price she paid for that one outburst of defiance.

When she recovered consciousness, she awaited his return home, that she might fall at his feet and implore his forgiveness. Her love for him overmastered pride. She clung to his love as she clung to life—even more tenaciously, indeed.

But he did not return, though one by one the hours of the night dragged themselves by, while her vigil was unbroken. He had resolved never to look upon her again until he could tell her that his rival was dead.

As the sun rose, it found Leoline pacing the floor of her room like a caged tigress, striking her breast and wringing her hands, while low, fierce moans escaped her lips from time to time.

An hour passed—two—three. Still she paced back and forth, back and forth, with the restless iteration of a wild animal. She had not changed her dress since the day before. She had pulled her hair down, so that it fell about her in wild abandon. Sometimes she tugged at it, that physical pain might divert her from her mental agony. Sometimes she tossed it impatiently back from her face.

The mirror seemed to have an irresistible fascination for her. She would look into it at her reflection, and laugh hysterically at the wildness in her face.

The bell rung.

She stopped in the middle of the floor, like a wild beast whose attention is arrested, and listened.

There was a pause, then approaching footsteps and a knock on the door. It was a servant who announced a gentleman to see Madame de Calignay.

Miriam had no visitors. It must be a stranger with intelligence concerning M. de Calignay, thinking his wife the proper person to communicate with.

Leoline became ghastly pale. Her eyes glittered strangely. She seemed to hold her breath.

Without attending to her toilet she walked straight to the reception-room. Her walk was a march that might have become Lady Macbeth.

A gentleman, looking very grave and pale, rose as she entered. Her appearance seemed to startle him.

"Well?" she said, in a hoarse, harsh voice.

"Madam," said the gentleman, with his eyes on the floor. "I have a painful—"

"Ah! He is dead!"

The words sounded scarcely human.

The gentleman started and looked up.

"Have you been informed?" he stammered.

"Bring him here, at once!" she said, not answering the question.

The gentleman, looking frightened at her corpse-like look, bowed himself out.

Leoline went into Miriam's room.

The girl was reclining on a couch. She was greatly emaciated already, which showed how she had suffered. She lay with her eyes closed, like one in utter hopelessness. With the yellow tint of the fever still in her face, she might have been taken for one at the point of death. She was waiting for death!

At Leoline's entrance she opened her eyes languidly. Then, frightened by the terrible look in the actress's face, she started to a sitting posture.

Leoline stopped in the middle of the floor, stretched out her hands tragically, and cried:

"Rejoice! You are free! Raoul de Calignay is dead!"

"Dead?" echoed Miriam.

"I have come but to tell you one thing," pursued the actress. "Know that before he ever saw you he loved me. I am no more his niece than you. He loved me with the love he would give his wife. He loved me with his whole soul! Every instant of the time since then till now he has loved me, and only me. For you he felt only such indifference that he would not use you for the beguilement of an hour! You could no more make his pulses quicken than could an image of wood. It was his purpose and my purpose to give you the shadow of his name—honor enough, and more than enough for such as you!—until he could get the money you had no right to inherit, and then kill you like a mangy cat! Then he would have turned to me, to lavish all his wealth and love on me. Hear me! He loved me so that one mad word from my lips sent him out to death!"

"Flash! Not a sound! He is coming!"

She turned, looking in the direction of the door.

There were sounds of heavy footsteps on the stair, which did not stop until they reached the reception-room.

After a pause they receded, and all was still.

Miriam was too much shocked and awed to speak or move.

Leoline turned to her again.

"A last word," she said. "Understand he is mine—all mine! Beside my great love, your shadowy claim is nothing! If you dare to infringe on my right by so much as touching his body with your finger, I will strangle you on the spot!"

She turned and left Miriam cowering breathless with terror.

In the reception-room in the center of the floor stood a hand-bier with a black pall, beneath which was plainly outlined a stark, still form.

Near the door, in attitudes of deference, stood the gentleman she had first seen and two men in attendance.

Leoline stretched out her arm, pointing to the door, like a tragedy queen, and said simply:

"Go!"

In silence they withdrew.

The actress did not look at the bier, but passed round it, locked the door; then darkened the windows, by drawing the curtains and hanging shawls before them, until the room was as dark as night. In the darkness she groped to the bier and crouched down on the floor beside it. No sound passed her lips; no tears came to her eyes; her body was motionless.

All that day and night, and far into the next day no one dared to intrude upon her grief. Even the coroner was kept at bay by the gentleman who had seen her face in its terrible, stony expression.

At last the duty of the officer of the law compelled him to act.

They knocked on the door.

There was no response

Louder.

Dead silence!

At last they had to force the lock.

They found one stark and stiff in death and one living, but with the light of reason gone forever.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### "NEVER LET HER KNOW!"

JAMES BOWIE stood before Dr. Meredith. Beneath his clothes there was a bandage about his body over the line scored across his breast by M. de Calignay's bullet.

He was ghastly pale, but from mental suffering.

He had walked into Dr. Meredith's presence while the latter was waiting breakfast for him, and startled him by his altered appearance. The doctor looked his question, but remained silent, awed by the shadow of a great tragedy.

Without prelude, Bowie said:

"He is dead, and she is free! His blood is on my hands. She will never need to shrink from yours in horror. This is my atonement to her for her father's life. She will be happy—"

He stopped, a spasm of pain compressing his bloodless lips.

Dr. Meredith had risen to his feet in dismay.

"Dead!" he repeated, in awe.

"I knew that he would kill you, if you met. I quarreled with him, compelling him to call me out, and shot him dead, to save your life."

"My God!" exclaimed the doctor, starting forward with outstretched hands.

But Bowie waved him off.

"No gratitude from you!" he cried, almost fiercely. "I did not do it for you. It was for her sake! I know that she loves you. For your death nothing on earth would console her. God knows she has had misery enough! I could spare her this. I have done it."

"But do you think it cost me nothing? I love her, too! Do you love her so well as I? See what I have done. What prevented me from letting him kill you, then taking my turn with him, and, after you were both out of my path, becoming her consoler? Nothing but my love for her! I have endured to crush my own heart and give her to a rival that she might be happy! That, I say, is my atonement to her. I make it freely."

"But you, who have been benefited indirectly, owe me something: I demand in quittance what will cost you nothing. Of those who know that my hand struck her father down you alone will ever have access to her. Give me this pledge, and we are quits—that you will never let her know!"



"I can never express to you—" began Dr. Meredith, choking with emotion.

But James Bowie interrupted him harshly:

"Answer me! Yes, or no?"

"I will never let her know, I give you my word of honor!"

"Enough! I shall never see you again. Her I could not endure to look upon, lest I should fall at her feet and tell her all!"

He paused, struggling with a whelming tide of emotions.

Dr. Meredith gazed upon this man with a great pity, a great wonder, a great reverence. His voice shook as he said:

"Once I refused your hand. Will you give it me now?"

But Bowie did not heed, if indeed he heard him. Into the hard and bloodshot eyes for the first time came stranger tears. With his eyes and his clinched hand raised heavenward, he said:

"I yield her to you, who are less unworthy than I. As you deal by her, so may God bless or curse you!"

Abruptly he turned, and was gone. He went to a hero's life and death at the Alamo. History tells the story!

His patron dead, Ezreth Quirk, Esq.'s money soon took to itself wings and flew away; just how he could never tell, so he laid the blame of their return to room 49, No. 7, Court House Place, at Mrs. Quirk's door, setting it down to the score of extravagant living. That lady, an imbibed woman, barred the life out of him, twitting him of his want of management. Only the children were glad of the return. Their unaccustomed clothes, and the other restraints of society, irked them. Now they once more reveled in dirt and freedom, making "pop tote'em around the room pack-aback," and were happy.

In due time the world had a new tragedian, whose melting pathos brought tears to the sternest eyes. He had been Sammy!

In a private asylum, not far from the Crescent City, might have been seen as painful a spectacle as the eye ever rested upon. It was a woman of remarkable physical beauty, yet, as the attendant told you in an awed voice, "without a soul!" From the day they found her crouching like a wild animal beside the body of the man she had loved so madly, she had never spoken a word nor betrayed an emotion. As docile as a child when led by the hand, when left alone she sat motionless, with her eyes on the ground. Had there been none to put food to her mouth, she would have starved to death, making no sign. Though she knew it not, she owed the care that was taken of her to Miriam Wingate's generosity.

And Miriam! But now we come down to the present time. Far from the scene of her suffering, in a beautiful villa, surrounded by magnificent grounds, in one of the matchless suburbs of Boston, lives an elderly lady of seventy, or thereabouts. We see her sitting on the piazza in a rustic chair, on a warm June afternoon, dressed in elegant black silk and with her gray hair lying smooth beneath a lace cap. Her genial smile warms our heart, and we know that God has crowned her life with a peaceful and happy old age.

Beside her sits a gentleman whose hair and beard are also gray. His hand rests on hers. That tells its own story.

Around this couple on the piazza, are seated sedate men and matronly women.

Before these, on the lawn, variously disposed, are younger men and women, in the full pride and bloom of life.

Lastly, children brighten the picture with their sunny smiles.

Four generations are here assembled in honor of a Golden Wedding!

THE END.

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SEC. II. THE ART OF ORATORY. Sheridan's List of the Passions: Tranquillity, Cheerfulness, Mirth, Rallery, Buffoonery, Joy, Delight, Gravity, Inquiry, Attention, Modesty, Perplexity, Pity, Grief, Melancholy, Despair, Fear, Shame, Remorse, Courage, Boasting, Pride, Obstinacy, Authority, Commanding, Forbidding, Affirming, Denying, Difference, Agreeing, Exhorting, Judging, Approving, Acquitting, Condemning, Teaching, Pardon-ing, Arguing, Dismissing, Refusing, Granting, De-pendence, Veneration, Hope, Desire, Love, Re-spect, Giving, Wonder, Admiration, Gratitude, Cu-riosity, Persuasion, Tempting, Promising, Affecta-tion, Sloth, Intoxication, Anger, etc.

SEC. III. THE COMPONENT ELEMENTS OF AN ORATION.—Rules of Composition as applied to Words and Phrases, viz.: Purity, Propriety, Precision. As applied to Sentences, viz.: Length of Sentence, Clearness, Unity, Strength. Figures of Speech; the Exordium, the Narration, the Proposition, the Confirmation, the Refutation, the Peroration.

SEC. IV. REPRESENTATIVE EXERCISES IN PROSE AND VERSE.—Transition; A Plea for the Ox; Falstaff's Soliloquy on Honor; the Burial of Lincoln; the Call and Response; the Bayonet Charge; History of a Life; the Bugle; the Bells; Byron; Macbeth and the Dagger; Hamlet's Soliloquy; Old Things; Look Upward; King William Rufus, the Eye; an Essa Onto Musik; Discoveries of Galileo.

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